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Mystery Magazine

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"This is a very nice neighborhood," Mrs. Swanson, the landlady, said, "but the crime rate in London is rising all the time and I always say you can't be too careful . . ."

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YOU CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL

by RUTH RENDELL

Della Galway went out with a man for the first (and almost the last) time on her nineteenth birthday. He parked his car, and as they were going into the restaurant she asked him if he had locked all the doors and the boot. When he turned back and said yes, he'd better do that, she asked him why he didn't have a burglarproof locking device on the steering wheel.

Her parents had brought her up to be cautious. When she left that happy home in that safe little provincial town, she took her parents' notions with her to London. At first she could only afford the rent of a single room. It upset her that the other tenants often came in late at night and left the front door on the latch. Although her room was at the top of the house and she had nothing worth stealing, she lay in bed sweating with fear. At work it was the same. Nobody bothered about security measures. Della was always the last to leave, and sometimes she went back two or three times to check that all the office doors and the outer door were shut.

The personnel officer suggested she see a psychiatrist.

Della was very ambitious. She had an economics degree, a business studies diploma, and had come out top at the end of her sec-

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retarial course. She knew a psychiatrist would find something wrong with her—they had to earn their money like everyone else—and long sessions of treatment would follow which wouldn't help her towards her goal, that of becoming the company's first woman director. They always held that sort of thing against you.

"That won't be necessary," she said in her brisk way. "It was the firm's property I was worried about. If they like to risk losing their valuable equipment, that's their lookout."

She stopped going back to check the doors—it didn't prey on her mind much since her own safety wasn't involved—and three weeks later two men broke in, stole all the electric typewriters, and damaged the computer beyond repair. It proved her right, but she didn't say so. The threat of the psychiatrist had frightened her so much that she never again aired her burglar obsession at work.

When she got a promotion and a salary rise, she decided to get a flat of her own. The landlady was a woman after her own heart. Mrs. Swanson liked Della from the first and explained to her, as to a kindred spirit, the security arrangements.

"This is a very nice neighborhood, Miss Galway, but the crime rate in London is rising all the time and I always say you can't be too careful."

Della said she couldn't agree more.

"So I always keep this side gate bolted on the inside. The back door into this little yard must also be kept locked and bolted. The bathroom window looks out onto the garden, you see, so I like the garden door and the bathroom door to be locked at night too."

"Very wise," said Della, noting that the window in the bed-sitting room had screws fixed to its sashes which prevented its being opened more than six inches. "What did you say the rent was?"

"Twenty pounds a week." Mrs. Swanson was a landlady first and a kindred spirit secondly, so when Della hesitated she said, "It's a garden flat, completely self-contained, and you've got your own phone. I shan't have any trouble in letting it. I've got someone else coming to view it at two."

Della stopped hesitating. She moved in at the end of the week, having supplied Mrs. Swanson with references and assured her she was quiet, prudent as to locks and bolts, and not inclined to have "unauthorized" people to stay overnight. By unauthorized people Mrs. Swanson meant men. Since the episode over the car

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on her nineteenth birthday, Della had entered tentatively upon friendships with men, but no man had ever taken her out more than twice and none had ever got as far as to kiss her. She didn't know why this was. She had always been polite and pleasant, insisting on paying her share, careful to carry her own coat, handbag and parcels so as to give her escort no trouble, ever watchful of his wallet and keys, offering to have the theater tickets in her own safekeeping, and anxious not to keep him out too late. That one after another man dropped her worried her very little. No spark of sexual feeling had ever troubled her, and the idea of sharing her orderly, routine-driven life with a man—untidy, feckless, casual creatures as they all, with the exception of her father, seemed to be—was a daunting one. She meant to get to the top on her own. One day perhaps, when she was about thirty-five and with a high-powered lady executive's salary, then if some like-minded, quiet and prudent man came along . . . In the meantime, Mrs. Swanson had no need to worry.

Della was very happy with her flat. It was utterly quiet, a little sanctum tucked at the back of the house. She never heard a sound from her neighbors in the other parts of the house and they, of course, never heard a sound from her. She encountered them occasionally when crossing from her own front door to the front door of the house. They were mouselike people who scuttled off to their holes with no more than a nod and a "good evening." This was as it should be. The flat, too, was entirely as it should be.

The bed-sitter looked just like a livingroom by day, for the bed was let down from a curtained recess in the wall only at night. Its window overlooked the yard, which Della never used. She never unbolted the side gate or the back door or, needless to say, attempted to undo the screws and open the window more than six inches.

Every evening, when she had washed the dishes and wiped down every surface in the immaculate well-fitted kitchen, had her bath, made her bedtime drink, and let the bed down from the wall, she went on her security rounds just as her father did at home. First she unlocked and unbolted the back door and crossed the yard to check that the side gate was securely fastened. It always was, as no one ever touched it, but Della liked to make absolutely sure, and sometimes went back several times in case her eyes had deceived her. Then she bolted and locked the back door, the garden door, and the bathroom door. All these doors opened

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out of a small room, about ten feet square—Mrs. Swanson called it the garden room—which in its turn could be locked off by yet another door from the kitchen. Della locked it. She rather regretted she couldn't lock the door that led from the kitchen into the bed-sitting room but, owing to some oversight on Mrs. Swanson's part, there was no lock on it. However, her own front door in the bed-sitter itself was locked, of course, on the Yale. Finally, before getting into bed, she bolted the front door.

Then she was safe. Though she sometimes got up once or twice more to make assurance trebly sure, she generally settled down at this point into blissful sleep, certain that even the most accomplished of burglars couldn't break in.

There was only one drawback—the rent.

"The flat," said Mrs. Swanson, "is really intended for two people. A married couple had it before you, and before that two ladies shared it."

"I couldn't share my bed," said Della with a shudder, "or, come to that, my room."

"If you found a nice friend to share, I wouldn't object to putting up a single bed in the garden room. Then your friend could come and go by the side gate, provided you were prepared to *promise* me it would always be bolted at night."

Della wasn't going to advertise for a flatmate. You couldn't be too careful. Yet she had to find someone if she was going to afford any new winter clothes, not to mention heating the place. It would have to be the right person, someone to fill all her own exacting requirements as well as satisfy Mrs. Swanson . . .

"Ooh, it's lovely!" said Rosamund Vine. "It's so quiet and clean. And you've got a garden! You should see the dump I've been living in. It was over-run with mice."

"You don't get mice," said Della repressively, "unless you leave food about."

"I won't do that. I'll be ever so careful. I'll go halves with the rent and I'll have the key to the back door, shall I? That way I won't disturb you if I come in late at night."

"I hope you won't come in late at night," said Della. "Mrs. Swanson's very particular about that sort of thing."

"Don't worry." Rosamund sounded rather bitter. "I've nothing and no one to keep me out late. Anyway, the last bus passes the end of the road at a quarter to twelve."

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Della pushed aside her misgivings, and Mrs. Swanson, interviewing Rosamund, appeared to have none. She made a point of explaining the safety precautions, to which Rosamund listened meekly and with earnest nods of her head. Della was glad this duty hadn't fallen to her, as she didn't want Rosamund to tell exaggerated tales about her at work. So much the better if she could put it all on Mrs. Swanson.

Rosamund Vine had been chosen with the care Della devoted to every choice she made. It had taken three weeks of observation and keeping her ears open to select her. It wouldn't do to find someone on too low a salary or, on the other hand, someone with too lofty a position in the company. She didn't like the idea of a spectacularly good-looking girl, for such led hectic lives, or too clever a girl, for such might involve her in tiresome arguments. An elegant girl would fill the cupboards with clothes and the bathroom with cosmetics. A gifted girl would bring in musical instruments or looms or paints or trunks full of books. Only Rosamund, of all the candidates, qualified. She was small and quiet and prettyish, a secretary (though not Della's secretary), the daughter of a clergyman who, by coincidence, had been at the same university at the same time as Della's father. Della, who had much the same attitude as Victorian employers had to their maids' "followers," noted that she had never heard her speak of a boy friend or overheard any cloakroom gossip as to Rosamund's love life.

The two girls settled down happily together. They seldom went out in the evenings. Della always went to bed at eleven sharp and would have relegated Rosamund to her own room at this point but for one small difficulty. With Rosamund in the garden room—necessarily sitting on her bed as there was nowhere else to sit—it wasn't possible for Della to make her security rounds. Only once had she tried doing it with Rosamund looking on.

"Goodness," Rosamund had said, "this place is like Fort Knox. All those keys and bolts! What are you so afraid of?"

"Mrs. Swanson likes to have the place locked up," said Della, but the next night she made hot drinks for the two of them and sent Rosamund to wait for her in the bed-sitter before creeping out into the yard for a secret check-up.

When she came back Rosamund was examining her bedside table. "Why do you put everything in order like that, Della? Your book at right angles to the table and your cigarette packet at

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right angles to your book, and, look, your ashtray's exactly an inch from the lamp as if you'd measured it out."

"Because I'm a naturally tidy person."

"I do think it's funny your smoking. I never would have guessed you smoked till I came to live here. It doesn't seem in character. And your glass of water. Do you want to drink water in the night?"

"Not always," Della said patiently. "But I might want to, and I shouldn't want to have to get up and fetch it, should I?"

Rosamund's questions didn't displease her. It showed that the girl wanted to learn the right way to do things. Della taught her that a room must be dusted every day, the fridge defrosted once a week, the table laid for breakfast before they went to bed, all the windows closed and the catches fastened. She drew Rosamund out as to the places she had previously lived in with a view to contrasting past squalor with present comfort, and she received a shock when Rosamund made it plain that in some of those rooms, attics, converted garages, she had lived with a man. Della made no comment but froze slightly. And Rosamund, thank goodness, seemed to understand her disapproval and didn't go into details. But soon after that she began going out in the evenings.

Della didn't want to know where she was going or with whom. She had plenty to occupy her own evenings, what with the work she brought home, her housework, washing and ironing, her twice-weekly letter to her mother and father, and the commercial Spanish she was teaching herself from gramophone records. It was rather a relief not to have Rosamund fluttering about. Besides, she could do her security rounds in peace. Not, of course, that she could check up on the side gate till Rosamund came in. Necessarily, it had to remain unbolted, and the back door to which Rosamund had the key, unlocked. But always by ten to twelve at the latest she'd hear the side gate open and close and hear Rosamund pause to draw the bolts. Then her feet tiptoeing across the yard, then the back door unlocked, shut, locked. After that, Della could sleep in peace.

The first problem arose when Rosamund came in one night and didn't bolt the gate after her. Della listened carefully in the dark, but she was positive those bolts hadn't been drawn. Even if the back door was locked, it was unthinkable to leave that side gate on nothing all night but its flimsy latch. She put on her dressing gown and went through the kitchen into the garden room.

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Rosamund was already in bed, her clothes flung about on the coverlet. Della picked them up and folded them. She was coming back from the yard, having fastened those bolts, when Rosamund sat up and said: "What's the matter? Can't you sleep?"

"Mrs. Swanson," said Della with a light indulgent laugh, "wouldn't be able to sleep if she knew you'd left that side gate unbolted."

"Did I? Honestly, Della, I don't know what I'm doing half the time. I can't think of anyone but Chris. He's the most marvelous person and I do think he's just as mad about me as I am about him. I feel as if he's changed my whole life."

Della let her spend nearly all the following evening describing the marvelous Chris, how brilliant he was—though at present unable to get a job fitting his talents—how amusing, how highly educated—though so poor as to be reduced to borrowing a friend's room while that friend was away. She listened and smiled and made appropriate remarks, but she wondered when she had last been so bored. Every time she got up to try and play one of her Spanish records, Rosamund was off again on another facet of Chris's dazzling personality, until at last Della had to say she had a headache and would Rosamund mind leaving her on her own for a bit?

"Anyway, you'll see him tomorrow. I've asked him for a meal."

Unluckily, this happened to be the evening Della was going to supper with her aunt on the other side of London. They had evidently enjoyed themselves, judging by the mess in the kitchen, Della thought when she got home. There were few things she disliked more than wet dishes left to drain. Rosamund was asleep. Della crept out into the yard and checked that the bolts were fastened.

"I heard you wandering about ever so late," said Rosamund in the morning. "Were you upset about anything?"

"Certainly not. I simply found it rather hard to get to sleep because it was past my normal time."

"Aren't you funny?" said Rosamund, and she giggled.

The next night she missed the last bus.

Della had passed a pleasant evening, studying firstly the firm's annual report, then doing a Spanish exercise. By eleven she was in bed, reading the memoirs of a woman company chairman. Her bedside light went off at half-past and she lay in the dark waiting for the sound of the side gate.

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Her clock had luminous hands, and when they passed ten to twelve she began to feel a nasty jumping sensation all over her body. She put on the light, switched it off immediately. She didn't want Rosamund bursting in with all her silly questions and comments. But Rosamund didn't burst in, and the hands of the clock closed together on midnight. There was no doubt about it. The last bus had gone and Rosamund hadn't been on it.

Well, the silly girl needn't think she was going to stand this sort of thing. She'd bolt that side gate herself and Rosamund could stay out in the street all night. Of course she might ring the front door bell, she was silly and inconsiderate enough to do that, but it couldn't be helped. Della would far rather be awakened at one or two o'clock than lie there knowing that side gate was open for anyone to come in. She put on her dressing gown and made her way through the spotless kitchen to the garden room. Rosamund had hung a silly sort of curtain over the back door, not a curtain really but a rather dirty Indian bedspread. Della lifted it distastefully—and then she realized. She couldn't bolt the side gate because the back door into the yard was locked and Rosamund had the key.

A practical person like herself wasn't going to be defeated that way. She'd go out by the front door, walk around to the side entrance and—but, no, that wouldn't work either. If she opened the gate and bolted it on the inside, she'd simply find herself bolted inside the yard. The only thing was to climb out of the window. She tried desperately to undo the window screws, but they had hardened up from years of disuse and she couldn't shift them. Trembling now, she sat down on the edge of her bed and lit a cigarette. For the first time in her life she was in an insecure place by night, alone in a London flat, with nothing to separate her from hordes of rapacious burglars but a feeble back-door lock which any tyro of a thief could pick open in five minutes.

How criminally careless of Mrs. Swanson not to have provided the door between the bed-sitter and the kitchen with a lock! There was no heavy piece of furniture she could place against the door. The phone was by her bed, of course, but if she heard a sound and dialed for the police, was there a chance of their getting there before she was murdered and the place ransacked?

What Mrs. Swanson had provided was one of the most fearsome-looking breadknives Della had ever seen. She fetched it from the kitchen and put it under her pillow. Its presence made

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her feel slightly safer, but suppose she didn't wake up when the man came in? Suppose. . .? That was ridiculous, she wouldn't sleep at all. Exhausted, shaken, feeling physically sick, she crawled under the bedclothes and, after concentrated thought, put the light out. Perhaps, if there was no light on, he would go past her, not know she was there, make his way into the main part of the house, and if by then she hadn't actually died of fright. . .

At twenty minutes past one, when she had reached the point of deciding to phone for a car to take her to an hotel, the side gate clicked and Rosamund entered the yard. Della fell back against the pillows with a relief so tremendous that she couldn't even bother to go out and check the bolts. So what if it wasn't bolted? The man would have to pass Rosamund first, kill her first. Della found she didn't care at all about what might happen to Rosamund, only about her own safety.

She sneaked out at half-past six to put the knife back, and she was sullenly eating her breakfast, the whole flat immaculate, when Rosamund appeared at eight.

"I missed the last bus. I had to get a taxi."

"You could have phoned," said Della.

"Goodness, you sound just like my mother. It was bad enough having to get up and . . ." Rosamund blushed and put her hand over her mouth." I mean, go *out* and get that taxi and . . . Well, I wasn't all that late."

Her little slip of the tongue hadn't been lost on Della. But she was too tired to make any rejoinder beyond saying that Mrs. Swanson would be very annoyed if she knew, and would Rosamund give her fair warning next time she intended to be late? Rosamund said, when they met again that evening, that she couldn't give her fair warning as she couldn't be sure herself. Della said no more. What, anyway, would be the use of knowing what time Rosamund was coming in when she couldn't bolt the gate?

Three mornings later her temper flared.

On two of the intervening nights Rosamund had missed the last bus. The funny thing was that she didn't look at all tired or jaded, while Della was worn-out. For three hours on the previous night she had lain stiffly clutching the breadknife while the old house creaked about her and the side gate rattled in the wind.

"I don't know why you bother to come home at all."

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"Won't you mind if I don't?"

"Not a bit. Do as you like."

Stealthily, before Rosamund left the flat by the front door, Della slipped out and bolted the gate. Rosamund, of course (being utterly imprudent), didn't check the gate before she locked the back door. Della fell into a heavy sleep at ten o'clock to be awakened just after two by a thudding on the side gate followed by a frenzied ringing of the front doorbell.

"You locked me out!" Rosamund sobbed. "Even my mother never did that! I was locked out in the street and I'm frozen! What have I done to you that you treat me like that?"

"You said you weren't coming home."

"I wasn't going to, but we went out and Chris forgot his key. He's had to sleep at a friend's place. I wish I'd gone there too!"

They were evidently two of a kind. Well-suited, Della thought. Although it was nearly half-past two in the morning, this seemed the best moment to have things out. She addressed Rosamund in her precise schoolmistressy voice.

"I think we'll have to make other arrangements, Rosamund. Your ways aren't my ways, and we don't really get on, do we? You can stay here till you find somewhere else, but I'd like to start looking round straightaway."

"But what have I *done*? I haven't made a noise or had my friends here. I haven't even used your phone, not once. Honestly, Della, I've done my best to keep the place clean and tidy, and it's nearly killed me!"

"I've explained what I mean. We're not the same kind of people."

"I'll go on Saturday. I'll go to my mother—it won't be any worse, God knows—and then maybe Chris and I. . ."

"You'd better go to bed now," Della said coldly, but she couldn't get any sleep herself. She was wondering how she had been such a bad judge of character; and wondering too what she was going to do about the rent. Find someone else, of course. An older woman perhaps, a widow or a middle-aged spinster. . .

What she was determined not to do was reveal to Rosamund, at this late stage, her anxiety about the side gate. If anything remained to comfort her, it was the knowledge that Rosamund thought her strong, mature, and sensible. But not revealing it brought her an almost unbearable agony. For Rosamund seemed to think the very sight of her would be an embarrassment to

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Della. Each evening she was gone from the flat before Della got home, and each time she had gone out leaving the side gate unbolted and the back door locked. Della had no way of knowing whether she would come in on the last bus or get a taxi or be seen home in the small hours by Chris. She didn't know whether Chris lived near or far away, and now she wished she had listened more closely to Rosamund's confidences and asked a few questions of her own. Instead, she had only thought with a shudder how nasty it must be to have to sleep with a man, and had wondered if she would ever bring herself to face the prospect.

Each night she took the breadknife to bed with her, confirmed in her conviction that she wasn't being unreasonable when one of the mouselike people whom she met in the hall told her the house next door had been broken into and its old-woman occupant knocked on the head. Rosamund came in once at one, once at half-past two, and once she didn't come in at all. Della got great bags under her eyes and her skin looked grey. She fell asleep over her desk at work while a bright-eyed, vivacious Rosamund regaled her friends in the cloakroom about the joys of her relationship with Chris.

But now there was only one more night to go . . .

Rosamund had left a note to say she wouldn't be home. She'd see Della on the following evening when she collected her cases to take them to her mother. But she'd left the side gate unbolted. Della seriously considered bolting it and then climbing back over it into the side entrance, but it was too high and smooth for her to climb and there wasn't a ladder. Nothing for it but to begin her vigil with the cigarettes, the glass of water, the phone, and the breadknife. It ought to have been easier, this last night, just because it was the last. Instead, it was worse than any of the others. She lay in the dark, thinking of the old woman next door, of the house that was precisely the same as the one next door, and of the intruder who now knew the best and simplest way in. She tried to think of something else, anything else, but the strongest instinct of all over-rode all her feeble attempts to concentrate on tomorrow, on work, on ambition, on the freedom and peace of tomorrow when that gate would be locked, never again to be opened.

Rosamund had said she wouldn't be in. But you couldn't rely on a word she said. Della wasn't, therefore, surprised (though she was overwhelmingly relieved) to hear the gate click just before two. Sighing with a kind of ecstasy—for tomorrow had come—she

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listened for the sound of the bolts being drawn across. The sound didn't come. Well, that was a small thing. She'd fasten the bolts herself when Rosamund was in bed. She heard footsteps moving very softly, and then the back door was unlocked. Rosamund took a longer time than usual about unlocking it, but maybe she was tired or drunk or heaven knew what.

Silence.

Then the back door creaked and made rattling sounds as if Rosamund hadn't bothered to relock it. Wearily, Della hoisted herself out of bed and slipped her dressing gown round her. As she did so, the kitchen light came on. The light showed round the edges of the old door in a brilliant phosphorescent rectangle. That wasn't like Rosamund who never went into the kitchen, who fell immediately into bed without even bothering to wash her face. A long shiver ran through Della. Her body taut but trembling, she listened. Footsteps were crossing the kitchen floor and the fridge door was opened. She heard the sounds of fumbling in cupboards, a drawer was opened and silver rattled. She wanted to call out, "Rosamund, is that you?" but she had no voice. Her mouth was dry and her voice had gone. Something occurred to her that had never struck her before. It struck her with a great thrust of terror. How would she know, how had she ever known, whether it was Rosamund or another who entered the flat by the side gate and the frail back door?

Then there came a cough.

It was a slight cough, the sound of someone clearing his throat, but it was unmistakably *his* throat. There was a man in the kitchen.

Della forgot the phone. She remembered—though she had scarcely for a moment forgotten her—the old woman next door. Blind terror thrust her to her feet, plunged her hand under the pillow for the knife. She opened the kitchen door, and he was there—a tall man, young and strong, standing right there on the threshold with Mrs. Swanson's silver in one hand and Mrs. Swanson's heavy iron pan in the other. Della didn't hesitate. She struck hard with the knife, struck again and again until the bright blood flew across the white walls and the clean ironing and the table neatly laid for breakfast.

The policeman was very nice to Rosamund Vine. He called her by her christian name and gave her a cup of coffee. She drank the

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coffee, though she didn't really want it. She had had a cup at the hospital when they told her Chris was dead.

"Tell me about last night, will you, Rosamund?"

"I'd been out with my boy friend—Chris Maitland. He'd forgotten his key and he hadn't anywhere to sleep so I said to come back with me. He was going to leave early in the morning before she—before Della was up. We were going to be very careful about that. And we were terribly quiet. We crept in at about two."

"You didn't call out?"

"No, we thought she was asleep. That's why we didn't speak to each other, not even in whispers. But she must have heard us." Her voice broke a little. "I went straight to bed. Chris was hungry. I said if he was as quiet as a mouse he could get himself something from the fridge, and I told him where the knives and forks and plates were. The next thing I heard this ghastly scream and I ran out and—and Chris was . . . There was blood everywhere . . ."

The policeman waited until she was calmer.

"Why do you think she attacked him with a knife?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"I think you do, Rosamund."

"Perhaps I do." Rosamund looked down. "She didn't like me going out."

"Because she was afraid of being there alone?"

"Della Galway," said Rosamund, "wasn't afraid of anything. Mrs. Swanson was nervous about burglars, but Della wasn't. Everyone in the house knew about the woman next door getting coshed, and they were all nervous. Except Della. She didn't even mention it to me, and she must have known."

"So she didn't think Chris was a burglar?"

"Of course she didn't." Rosamund started to cry. "She saw a man—my man. She couldn't get one of her own. Every time I tried to talk about him she went all cold and standoffish. She heard us come in last night and she understood and—and it sent her over the edge. It drove her crazy. I'd heard they wanted her to see a psychiatrist at work, and now I know why."

The policeman shivered a little in spite of his long experience. Fear of burglars he could understand, but this . . . "She'll see one now," he said, and then he sent the weeping girl home to her mother.

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continuing the new series by

HUGH PENTECOST

As we told you last month, when this new series began, Hugh Pentecost envisions a group of multinational corporations "on the verge of running the world," of breaking down all trade barriers in order to gain the ultimate in a Global Supermarket.

In such a corporation, which Mr. Pentecost calls Quadrant International, he imagines a head man with such enormous power that he considers himself above the law—able and willing to buy some foreign governments, to silence or remove enemies, to achieve his conglomerate goals by any means—blackmail, boycott, terror, violence . . .

It is that head man whom Jason Dark is trying to identify, that unknown supertycoon whom Jason Dark is pursuing singlehanded—literally . . .

THE DARK GAMBIT

by HUGH PENTECOST

He was a plump sandy-haired man wearing wire-rimmed glasses that were slightly tinted. He had come out by the swimming pool and had sat down in one of the aluminum deck chairs to watch the child floating on her back. She had waved to him, although she didn't know him, and he had waved back. His right hand was covered by a black glove. He drew it down quickly. It was still instinctive for him to use it.

The girl turned over and swam like a joyful porpoise, diving below the surface, rising up again and blowing water, then diving again. Finally she came to the edge of the pool where the man sat. It was the shallow end of the pool and she stood up. She took off her bright-scarlet bathing cap and shook out shoulder-length dark hair. She was about ten years old, he guessed.

"Hi," she said.

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"Hi," the man said.

"Do I know you?" she asked. "Or rather, should I know you, since I don't know you?" She laughed.

"I'm Jason Dark," he said, "which I'm sure doesn't mean anything to you. You must be Elizabeth Stanton."

"Everybody calls me Liz," she said. "Nice to meet you, Jason."

He had passed his fiftieth birthday but somehow she wasn't fresh; she was just being very natural.

"What's with your hand? I mean that black glove," she said.

No adult would have asked that direct question. Jason Dark's mouth tightened into a thin line for an instant, then it relaxed. "An accident," he said.

"Is your hand scarred or something?" she asked.

"It isn't really a hand," he said. "It's just a plastic substitute."

"Oh, wow!" the girl said, interested but not shocked. "How did it happen?"

How it happened she wasn't going to know, but the question sent unwanted images rushing across Jason Dark's memory screen. He could see his hand strapped to the butcher's block in the kitchen of the deserted restaurant; he could feel the agony as the man in the black ski-mask brought the flat side of the meat cleaver down on his hand, crushing the bones; he could hear his own unashamed screaming as ski-mask began to chop his hand to ribbons with the blade of the cleaver; he remembered being dumped in Central Park, in New York, and the tourniquet being applied to his arm by a shocked park policeman, who kept swearing under his breath; he could see the neat job the surgeon had done to finish the amputation.

"It got crushed in an accident," Dark said to the girl.

"Were you right-handed?" she asked.

Damn her persistence, he thought, but not angrily. She was just a curious child. "Well, I'm having to learn to write again. And it's hard to eat in public. In private, I can hold a steak down with this plastic hand and cut with my left. I can hold down a steak no matter how hot it is because there's no feeling in this." He held up the black gloved thing.

Her eyes clouded. "I don't think I want to talk about it any more, Jason," she said.

"I don't want to talk about it, either," he said. He smiled at her. "Tell me, where did they hold you, Liz?"

Her eyes widened with excitement. "It was in a little cottage by

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the ocean. I never saw how we got there so I don't know—" She stopped, clapping a hand over her mouth. "Oh, gee, I promised Daddy not to talk to anybody about it. Not *anybody*!"

"So we'll forget you said anything," Dark said.

A young man came out of the house and over to where Dark was sitting "The Senator will see you now, Mr. Dark. He's sorry to have kept you waiting."

"No sweat," Dark said. He stood up. "See you around, Liz."

"I'd like that, Jason."

Dark followed the Senator's aide toward the house.

"She's very quick with first names," the young man said.

"Rather nice, though," Dark said. "It helps you to know right away whether she likes you or not."

Senator Rufus Stanton was in his second term in the United States Senate, elected overwhelmingly by his Midwestern constituency. He was a young vigorous man with an attractive smile, light blue, rather shrewd eyes, and hair the color of his daughter's.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Dark," the Senator said. He looked up from the desk in his study, lined with calf-bound law books. He waved Dark to a chair. "I suppose you're disappointed in me."

"Astounded is more nearly the right word," Dark said. He fished a cigarette out of his left-hand jacket pocket, put it between his lips, then produced a lighter from the same pocket. He narrowed his eyes against the smoke. He was just beginning to manage simple things, like lighting a cigarette with his left hand.

The young Senator's voice sounded ragged with fatigue. "I thought about it and thought about it, Dark, and I finally decided not to make the speech in support of the new bill. I voted for it, of course."

"And it lost by two votes," Dark said. "A speech by you in support, with your eloquence, Senator, might have turned a dozen doubters into supporters. They were waiting for it. And so Quadrant International and a hundred other multinational corporations will continue to spread out over the globe like monstrous spiders!" Dark's voice had risen slightly, but now it was low again. "Well, at least, thank God she wasn't hurt."

The Senator's head jerked up, his eyes wide. "What the hell are you talking about?"

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The sunlight streaming through the study windows glinted on Jason Dark's tinted glasses. "You are a man whose integrity is beyond question, Senator. You are dedicated. You used information I supplied you with, plus the investigations of your personal staff, to build a case against multinational corporations in general and Quadrant International in particular. A speech from you on the Senate floor in support of the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill would have put a crimp in the indecent profits and the actual anti-American operations. You backed off at the last minute. I tried to guess why, and I could come up with only one answer. Someone had kidnaped your daughter. To get her back you had to keep your mouth shut."

"What nonsense!" Stanton said.

"They held her in a little cottage by the ocean," Dark said. "She couldn't see how they got there, so she can't tell where it is."

"Oh, my God!" Stanton said, his voice shaking.

"I'm sorry, Senator. I threw her a curve. She spoke a sentence and a half before she realized she was breaking her promise to you to say nothing to anyone about it."

"You'll never be able to guess what it was like," Stanton said, turning his head from side to side, pain etched on his face. "Everything I believed in, everything I'd spent months working on was at stake. The Vice-President kept looking down at me, knowing I was going to make a speech in support of the bill, waiting for me to ask for the floor, to be recognized. And all the while I could hear that voice on the phone. 'Make your speech, Senator, and you will never see your daughter alive again.' What else could I do, Dark, knowing they had Liz? It was right, wasn't it? She was returned, safe and sound, less than an hour after the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill was defeated."

"I guess I would have done the same thing," Dark said. "She's a lovely child."

"She's mine, my flesh and blood!"

Dark nodded. "So the milk is spilled, Senator. There's no point in crying over it. I have to go on with the fight, even if you can't."

"How can I help?"

"You could turn over your files to me, the information collected by your staff. I think I know it all, but there might be something there I've missed."

The Senator picked up his phone and gave an order to his secretary. He leaned back in his chair. "I've never asked you some-

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thing that interests me, Dark. I know you were a policeman before you became a private investigator."

"Twenty-two years as a cop and a detective," Dark said. "Then five years on my own."

"You gave all that up for a private crusade against Quadrant International," the Senator said. "Why?"

The end of Dark's cigarette glowed red as he took a deep drag on it. "You are a decent, liberal idealist, Senator," he said. "You were for legislation that would curb the power of the multinational corporations. All of them, not just Quadrant International. You don't like them because some of them buy elections in countries where there are elections, and even help arrange governments by assassinations in countries where the people have no voice. I have another reason. High up in the chain of command of Quadrant International is the man who gave the order for this!" Dark's voice shook. He held out his black plastic hand.

"If you can prove that—?"

"I will prove it," Dark said. "But it isn't just enough to destroy that one man, Senator. I intend to pull down his empire along with him."

"According to your information—notes supplied by you, Dark—General Motors is bigger than Switzerland, Pakistan, and South Africa put together. Royal Dutch Shell is bigger than Iran, Venezuela, and Turkey. Goodyear Tire is bigger than Saudi Arabia. Quadrant International is bigger than any two of a hundred big ones. You, one man, propose to destroy that kind of power?"

"Or die trying," Dark said quietly.

When Jason Dark unlocked the door of his room in Washington's Hanover House a pretty blonde girl, who had been sitting by the windows overlooking the Potomac, came quickly across to him and threw her arms around him, holding him close.

"My poor darling, what happened?" she asked.

Jason Dark had felt old and tired coming up in the elevator. He had worked for weeks preparing a case for Senator Stanton to present to his fellow Senators. The Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill, had it passed, would have struck a sharp and painful blow to Quadrant International and other multinational corporations that were trying to become the Earth's Managers. The girl's cool fingers on Dark's cheek revived him.

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This girl, Sharon Evans, was a recent miracle in Dark's life. She was young enough to be his daughter. It was preposterous that she could love him, and yet, by all that was holy, she did. He had used her, shamelessly, in his first move against Quadrant, and instead of hating him for it she had fallen in love with him, joined him as a woman and as an ally in his self-appointed search-and-destroy mission.

In moments when he was removed from the magic of her physical presence he debated whether she was a plus or a minus. An ally he could use; but she had, in effect, created a weakness in his position that hadn't been there before. If she was ever in danger—and she could be, simply by associating with him—he might back off, just as Senator Stanton had backed off, to make sure of her safety.

He looked at her steadily for a moment through his tinted wire-rimmed glasses, as if to make certain she was real and not a mirage.

"The Senator's daughter was kidnaped just before he was due to make his speech," Dark said. "No speech or else. He had no choice."

"And the girl?"

"Home, safe and sound." Dark described his brief visit with Liz Stanton.

"How awful for the Senator—and for the child's mother," Sharon said.

"The Senator is a widower," Dark said. "He lives quite simply. A cook-housekeeper and young Michael Braden, his aide and secretary, are the entire household."

"Make you a drink?" Sharon asked.

"Not just yet," Dark said. He walked over to the windows and looked down at the river. "Let me try something on you for size."

She came over to stand beside him, her arm linked through his. He looked at her, smiling faintly. "There are only a very few people in the world who can't be bought. There's you, and me, and at the moment I can't think of who else."

"Thanks for including me."

He touched her bright gold hair. "This was a tricky business, Sharon. It had to be handled very precisely. Given time to think about it, the Senator's reaction might not have been predictable."

"I don't follow."

"If Liz Stanton had been kidnaped hours before, or a day before,

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the Senator might have considered calling in the F.B.I., or some other course of action. But this is how it happened. The Senator got up at his usual time, had breakfast with his daughter as always, then went to his office in the Senate building. Just as he was about to go into the Senate Chamber to make his speech he got a phone call. 'No speech or else! He had no time to think, to weigh one action against another. He acted out of instinct, out of love."

"So?"

"This was terribly important to Quadrant and the others. Their plan wouldn't have been haphazard. They had to know exactly what the Senator planned to do. Would he make a speech in support of the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill? It didn't matter how he voted, only if he planned to make the speech that would sway other votes. They had to know for sure—and they did. Then there was the time pressure. They had to know exactly where Liz Stanton would be so they could snatch her. They couldn't risk her wandering off somewhere, or going to visit some unknown friend. They had to know *exactly* where she would be at the critical moment."

"How could they know that?"

"From someone in the household," Dark said. "Someone who knew that on Thursday mornings a special tutor came to the house to help Liz make up school work she'd lost because of a bout with measles. She *had* to be at home."

Sharon's eyes widened. "The housekeeper? The Senator's secretary?"

"I think we can eliminate the housekeeper," Dark said. "The person who told them—I think we should call them the 'enemy'—also had to know that the Senator was definitely going to make the speech. I can't see any reason for the Senator to confide in his cook. That leaves us with young Mr. Michael Braden, the secretary."

"He was an accessory to the kidnaping?"

"It would have to be proved," Dark said.

"How?"

Dark walked over to the desk in the corner of the room and wrote something on a plain sheet of paper. He handed it to Sharon. "See that this is delivered to Mr. Braden at breakfast time tomorrow morning."

Sharon glanced at the message. It read: "Come to the cottage at once. Urgent."

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"If he ignores that we're barking up the wrong tree," Dark said.

At a quarter past eight the following morning Michael Braden hurried out of Senator Stanton's house, went to the garage, and backed out his personal car. Gravel spattered against the fenders as he drove out onto the main highway. He looked around nervously. He saw the blonde girl in the parked car across the way, but she meant nothing to him. He had no reason to think he might be followed or that the blonde girl might be the follower.

Dark's plan was simple enough. If Braden took the bait he would drive to the "cottage by the ocean" where Liz Stanton had been held. There were some "ifs," of course. He might check out the message with someone by phone and discover it was a fake. But it was unlikely he would make such a call from the Senator's house. The Senator still hadn't gone to his office. Besides, the message itself would imply that a phone call was risky.

If he took the bait and drove to the cottage, Braden would have inadvertently confessed his guilt and Dark would learn who owned the cottage and where it was. Sharon was assigned the job of following because Braden knew Dark by sight and would instantly suspect something if he got a glimpse of him.

Dark waited by a pay phone about a block from the Senator's house.

Sharon, driving a rented car, followed Braden's car. It was difficult only because Braden drove so fast. Most of the traffic was coming into Washington. Braden was headed east, across Maryland, toward the ocean.

Checking her wrist watch, Sharon began to wonder if they could possibly reach their destination in less than an hour. Liz Stanton had been delivered safely home in just under an hour. Ahead, Braden's car turned off the highway. He drove up a small side road toward a high point of land. Sharon was puzzled, because this was nowhere near the ocean. Then off to the left she saw a large inland lake.

Up ahead Braden turned into a private driveway. Sharon drove straight on past the drive, catching sight of a name on an RFD mailbox. CARTER CLEAVES.

Sharon left her car about a hundred yards past the driveway and made her way through a dense pine woods to where she could get a view of the Cleaves house. It was something more than a cottage. It had wide picture windows looking out over the lake

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that Liz Stanton had mistaken for the ocean.

She could see Braden. He was standing by the front door. He had rung a bell, and getting no answer he was pounding on the door with his fist. No one answered, and Braden began to circle the house, peering in at the windows. Presently he gave up, evidently finding no one inside the house.

He stood by the front door again, anxiously consulting his watch. Finally, after a short wait, he wrote something on a page in a small notebook, tore out the page, and slid it under the front door. Sharon guessed his problem was to get back to the Senator before his absence was noticed.

Sharon didn't make any effort to follow Braden on the return trip. Her job was to find a telephone.

Dark answered her call almost instantly. He had been standing by the phone booth all the time.

"Jason? The child mistook a large lake for the ocean. The house belongs to someone named Carter Cleaves."

She heard soft laughter from Dark. "You know who Carter Cleaves is?" he asked. "A duly and legally registered lobbyist for Quadrant International."

"Jason!"

"Bingo," he said.

"Braden's on his way back in a big hurry," Sharon said.

"Go to the hotel and wait for me," Dark said. "Hope we have cause for a celebration."

Braden, driving in the heavy stream of traffic now, chafed at the slowness of it. When he finally reached the Senator's house he was wet with sweat. He put his car in the garage and hurried into the house. Mrs. Devens, the cook-housekeeper, was dusting the living room.

"Has the Senator been asking for me?" Braden asked.

"No, sir. He's gone to his office, of course."

"I have to pick up some things in the study," Braden said.

"Mr. Dark is in there, sir," Mrs. Devens said. "I thought it would be all right."

Braden stood very still, looking toward the study door. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the perspiration from his face. Then, his legs moving stiffly, he walked into the study.

Dark was sitting at the Senator's desk, the Quadrant file in front of him. He was smiling, a faintly mocking smile.

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"Good morning, Braden," he said. "It seems that part of the puzzle is explained."

"Puzzle?" Braden moistened his lips.

"I've wondered how the kidnapers got Liz back home in less than an hour if she was, in fact, being held 'by the ocean.' The child, who must have been scared out of her wits, mistook the lake in front of the Cleaves house for the ocean."

"The Cleaves house?" Braden asked, his voice husky.

"It will save us a good deal of time and fencing," Dark said, "if I tell you that I sent you the note that took you out to the Cleaves house this morning. You see, I wanted to know whom you'd sold out to. I knew it was someone at Quadrant, but who in the chain of command?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Braden said.

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" Dark asked. "You sold out the Senator, friend. You kept Quadrant informed of his intentions about the speech. You gave them the information that assured them Liz would be at home at the critical time. I imagine you gave Mrs. Devens some little job to do that kept her occupied. When I have told the Senator, God help you."

Frantic choices were mirrored in Braden's eyes. Choices—and fear.

"Of course, when Carter Cleaves is confronted with the proof that his house was used to hold the Senator's child he will deny all knowledge of it. He will say his unoccupied house was used by criminals. He will be told how we know—that you answered a fake note which led us to the house. He will, of course, deny that he has ever had any contact with you.

"But he will be sweating, just as you are, Braden. He will know that you may spill the whole story. He won't be able to risk that, so I suspect he will take steps to silence you. Permanently. It won't be just a warning, like this." Dark held up his black plastic hand. "Whatever you decide to do, Braden, you are up the well-known creek."

"This is all madness!" Braden said. It was nearly a whisper.

"I took the liberty of going through your room upstairs while I was waiting for you," Dark said. "You are an amateur, Braden, and like most amateurs you don't take the most obvious precautions. Only an amateur would keep his bankbooks where someone might find them. I'm afraid you'll never get to spend the twenty-five thousand dollars you deposited in your savings accounts three

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days ago." Dark stood up. "Bunglers always pay a heavy price for their bungling."

He picked up the Quadrant file and started for the door.

"Wait!" Braden said. He had moved around the desk. "There must be some way to—"

"There's no way," Dark said. He stepped to the door.

"Wait!" Braden said. "Wait if you want to live, Mr. Dark."

Dark turned. From a desk drawer Braden had produced a murderous-looking handgun. It was pointed straight at Dark's heart.

"Obviously I can't let you go through with this," Braden said.

Dark's smile was contemptuous. "You haven't got the guts," he said.

He turned his back on Braden and extended his left hand to the doorknob. Braden's finger pulled the trigger. There was a dull click. Again and again he pulled it. Dark turned.

"Do you suppose for a minute that I would confront you, Braden, knowing that you would back-shoot me the minute you had the chance? I found the gun long before you got here and pulled its teeth." He jiggled the cartridges in his left hand. "I also have an eye for shoulder holsters and pocket bulges. If you'd been carrying a gun I'd have shot you dead." He patted the holster under his right arm pit. "I'm not very good with my left hand, even after some months of practise. But at a distance of five feet—"

"Oh, God!" Braden moaned. He sank down in the desk chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Now we will see how good Mr. Carter Cleaves is at this game," Jason Dark said. "Too bad you won't be around, Braden, to witness the outcome."

He walked out into the warm summer sunshine. He hoped Sharon had decided on champagne. She got such a delight from popping the corks, something that was beyond him now that he was one-handed.

"Q"

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"The enemy had seemed a lot farther away in those days" . . .

CRAZY OLD LADY

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Before she became the Crazy Old Lady she had been merely the Old Lady and before that Old Lady Nelson and before that (long long before that) she had been Mrs. Nelson. At one time there had also been a Mr. Nelson, but all that was left of him were the war souvenirs lined up on the cluttered mantelpiece which was never dusted now—the model battleship, the enemy helmet, the enemy grenade, the enemy knife, and some odd bits and pieces that had been enemy badges and buttons.

The enemy had seemed a lot farther away in those days.

But the shopping had been a lot closer.

Of course it was still the same in miles—well, blocks, really—it just seemed like miles now. It had been such a nice walk, such a few blocks' walk, under the pleasant old trees, past the pleasant old family homes, and down to the pleasant old family stores. Now not much was left of the way it had been.

For one thing, the trees had not had sense enough to adjust to changing times. Their branches had interfered with the electric power lines and their roots had interfered with the sewer lines and their trunks had interfered with the sidewalks.

So most of the old trees had been cut down.

That was quite a shock and no one had prepared the Old Lady for it. One day the old trees had been there as always and then the next day there were only stumps and branches, bruised twigs and leaves and sawdust. And the next day not even that.

A lot of the old family homes had been, so to speak, cut down too, and most of those that had not been cut down had been cut up and converted into multiple dwelling units. It is odd that somehow families do not seem to feel the same about dwelling units as they do about homes.

And as for the pleasant old family stores, what had happened to them? Mr. Berman said, "There's hardly anything I sell today that they don't sell for less in the supermarket, Mrs. Nelson. The

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kids don't come in the way they used to with a note from their parents, they just come in to steal. I used to think my boy would take over when I'm gone but he came back from Vietnam in a box, so what's the use of talking."

Where there had been a lot of storefronts with either changing displays, which were interesting, or the same familiar old displays, which were comforting, now the storefronts were all boarded over.

The supermarket was where there hadn't been a supermarket—strange that it wasn't built where all the boarded-up stores were; strange that the pleasant old empty lot with its wild flowers had to give way to the supermarket, and now the children played in the street instead.

But that was the way it was. Prices may have been cheaper in the supermarket in the long run, but the prices had to be paid in cash and there were no deliveries, no monthly bills, no friendly delivery boy who thanked you for a fresh-baked cookie.

Often after Mr. Nelson passed away, the delivery boy—or was it his brother?—would mow the small lawn for a quarter. Now no one would mow the small lawn for a quarter or even for two quarters. No boys were interested in collecting empty bottles for the deposits, the way they used to be. Strange, if they were poor, why they would prefer to smash the bottles on the sidewalk and against the lampposts. The yard was a thicket now and not even a clean thicket.

"What is the world coming to?" the Old Lady used to ask.

By and by she stopped asking and started screeching. "Don't think I don't see you there!" she would screech. That was around the time they started calling her the Crazy Old Lady. She said the bigger boys had thrown rocks at her and the bigger boys denied this and the police said they could do nothing.

It wasn't the police who laughed when she took to wearing the military helmet whenever she did her shopping. She had to go out to do her shopping because it was a thing of the past to phone the store and say, "Now before I even ask about Esther and the new baby, don't let me forget the quarter pound of sweet butter for my pastry crust." Sometimes she would forget and call the old number which now belonged to some other people and after a while they weren't nice about it, not nice at all.

There were, of course, still some other old ladies and old gentlemen around in the old neighborhood, although she didn't at first

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think of them as old. "Now my Grandmother Delehanty, she was old and she had seen the soldiers marching off to remember the Maine and she never forgot anyone's birthday to the last day she lived, but I don't suppose you would remember her."

"Listen to the Crazy Old Lady talking to herself," some girls would say very loud and not nicely at all.

"There, never mind, Mrs. Nelson, pay no attention and we'll pretend we didn't notice, shhh," Mrs. Swift would say, hobbling up.

"Why, Mrs. Swift. Your arm! Your poor arm. What happened?"

"Let's just walk along together and I'll tell you when they aren't listening."

Mrs. Swift, what a fine-looking woman she had been in her time! Why would anyone want to knock her down so badly that she broke her arm?

"My grocery money was in my purse. I don't know what to do. I can't afford to live anywhere else."

"Oh dear, oh dear."

It just went to prove how necessary it was to wear the war helmet. If Mr. Schultz had been wearing one, would they have been able to fracture his skull?

They who?

"Why don't you catch them? What are the police for?"

The policemen said that the descriptions would fit half of the hoodlums in the neighborhood. "More than half," they said. The policemen said that about the one who killed Mr. Schultz. The policemen said that about the ones who had just grabbed her and pulled the war helmet off her head and then shoved her and had hardly bothered to run away very fast, just half looking back and half laughing. "You got off lucky," the policeman said to her. "Don't go out at night if you can help it."

"It was broad daylight!" she screeched.

And then someone threw a rock through her window. No, it wasn't a rock, it was the war helmet, her husband's souvenir from the mantelpiece. How hard they must have worked to dent it and bash it and cave it in so that no one could wear it now. And what was she to do about protection now when she had to go out for the quarter pound of bacon and the box of oatmeal and the three eggs? Where were the police?

"Sorry, lady, sorry," the policemen said. "You can't carry no knife this size. It's against the law." The knife was her husband's

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war souvenir of the enemy, but the police took it away from her anyway.

She wanted to tell Mrs. Swift—what a fine-looking woman she was in her time—and she called out, "Oh, Mrs. Swift," but her voice didn't carry. No one heard her over the street noises and the noises of all the radios and record players from every window and all the television sets on full blast. How fast the man was running when he grabbed Mrs. Swift's purse as though he had practised and practised, and he knocked her down as before and kicked her as she started to get up and then he ran away laughing and laughing with the purse held high up, shielding his face.

What could she do then? No helmet. No knife. And she had to go out shopping. She couldn't carry much at one time. She looked for the old coat with the inside pocket so she could keep the money in that, but somehow she couldn't find it and so she had to carry a purse after all.

Carrying the purse with the few dollars in it when the man came running up. She could hear him running and she started screeching when he grabbed her purse, just as she knew he would some day, and he tugged hard and the string broke. The Crazy Old Lady, had she thought tying something with a string to her scrawny old arm would help?

Then something fell to the sidewalk and jangled, a metal ring or pin, and he ran off laughing and faster than she could ever run, the purse held high to shield his face from passers-by as the Crazy Old Lady screeched after him. And he must have got almost half a block away when the enemy grenade went off.

It was well known, of course, that she was crazy, and really they take good care of her where she is, and anyway she can do her little bit of shopping in the canteen, as they call it, and nobody bothers her now at all.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

BRUCE M. FISHER

In the May 1974 issue of EQMM we published a story by Bruce M. Fisher titled "Story with Two Endings." Indeed the story did have two endings, one in the human-interest school, the other in the deductive-detective school. We invited readers to let us know which of the two endings they preferred and were amazed that, excluding two of the many letters we received, exactly one-half of the readers preferred the first ending and one-half preferred the second. Of the two other letters, one reader liked both endings and one reader didn't like either. You can't have a more perfect tie than that.

Now we bring you a new story by Bruce M. Fisher, one written unequivocally in the deductive-detective tradition but with a strong vein of human interest as well . . .

RICOCHET

by BRUCE M. FISHER

Janet Morlin laid the bolt of her single-shot .22 caliber rifle aside and smiled at her plump little husband across the table corner. He was mumbling again. He had been mumbling like that ever since her sister Carmel, a professional model, had made those oh-so-correct television commercials for Wetherson's. Not that there was anything between Ben and Carmel, though it helped to pretend that there was. "What did you say, dear?" she asked.

For a moment the pale blue eyes in his pale round face were blank, then his fatuous smile reflected the love of five happy years of marriage. "I said 'a penny for your thoughts.' I do believe you've oiled that bolt three times since we started cleaning the guns."

"Have I?" She shook black shoulder-length hair and wriggled her shapely body in the enticing way that delighted him. "It's just

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that I'm so happy with you, Ben. Sometimes I can hardly stand it. If anything happened to you, I'd just die. I know I would."

"Nothing's going to happen to me," he said. "Foresight is my guardian angel. I see things coming before they happen. But in any case, you're well provided for."

He couldn't know, of course. No more than he could realize the chance warning his words conveyed. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that," she said, reaching for the cleaning rod. "As if money was all that mattered."

"It matters a great deal." He wiped pieces of his slide-action .22 repeater with a dry cloth. "While you're alive, that is. It gets you what you want. But when you're dead—well, you can't take it with you."

No, you can't, she agreed silently, her heart-shaped face angelically smooth as she returned to the ever-increasing puzzle of sending him on his way.

It had to be a hunting accident. That way, the police might *suspect* murder done but they could never *know*. If she carried it off flawlessly, she might even gain sympathy from it, because it was an accident and everybody makes mistakes. Also, accidental death would double the amount she would gain from his life insurance by virtue of the double-indemnity clause.

And this fine suburban house with its lush carpets, cut-stone fireplace, spacious rooms, and polished woodwork was worth over $60,000 alone. There was Ben's savings in cash and bonds, no small amount. The expensive furniture, all the house contained. Hers, if she could carry it off.

But how in the world could she rig a foolproof hunting accident when the law stated that all hunters must wear blaze-orange vests while in the woods?

It was a color that did not appear naturally in the wild. It was light-reflecting, brilliant, unmistakable. Ben never went hunting without his orange vest and always insisted that she wear hers too. To shoot him while he was wearing it was practically a confession of murder. Accidents happened, but to "trip" and shoot him dead would make a mighty thin story indeed.

Was there no way to nullify that glaring vest which distinguished living man from all other objects in the autumn woods? She had racked her brain for weeks and hadn't found the answer.

"It was a pleasant surprise, your cousin Wilfred asking us out to the farm tomorrow," she said.

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Studiously, Ben reassembled his rifle. "I was pretty surprised myself, but the outing will do us good. You've been looking a trifle peaked lately."

"Oh?" She lowered her long lashes. Ben hadn't suspected a thing last year when, at her suggestion that small-game hunting might prove a good relaxation for them, he had bought the rifles.

Divorce was out of the question. Ben would simply kick her out at the mention of it, without a cent, without alimony, without anger. Disgust, perhaps, but no anger. Twenty years in Wetherson's, staid importers of teas, spices, and other commodities, had taught him a remarkable degree of composure and self-reliance. He was a hard decisive man under that exterior, and nobody's fool.

Yet she must have, above all else, freedom. She was sick of Ben's soft middle-aged body, so unlike the few lean, hard, passionate young men she had known before marriage. She was sick of the theater, of hearing music she didn't understand, when her soul craved a rousing, reckless movie; of conversing with a select group of friends on subjects beyond her comprehension when she yearned for livelier companionship; of the tedious little parties she hostessed for Ben in their home; of the housework, everything, even the wretched credit cards and the tiny runabout car.

"It will be lovely out in the country now," she said, putting her rifle in its case. "I especially like the view across the hills from that height of land behind Wilfred's fields. I feel like an eagle standing there, so free and unrestrained—" She stopped, not wanting to give the wrong impression.

"It makes me feel like an eagle too," he said. "The sense of power, the mastery—"

He tightened the screws of the slide-action grip. "To each his own. I daresay that Cousin Wilfred, if he looks at all, is content merely to admire the beauty of the view. That's why he dreams his life away on thirty cleared acres of land in the bush while I sit on the board at Wetherson's."

"Yes," she agreed. "To each his own."

Ben zipped his rifle case shut with a tearing sound that almost made her jump. "Have you any cartridges, dear?" he mumbled. "I find I'm completely out."

She had forgotten them while shopping, of course! How stupid of her. Had a guilty conscience made her forgetful? He couldn't go hunting without shells. "I've only got ten," she said. "Bream's. Bream's will be open yet, I imagine."

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He glanced at his watch and sighed. "Possibly. But they stock very limited ammunition." He rose, put a cap on his head, and went out to the car, a stuffy self-important little man with a dignified stride.

She put the gun-cleaning equipment away, wiped the table top, and sat down to coffee and a cigarette, thinking.

If she could put a knoll or a ferny hummock between them to hide that orange vest, could she mistake his thinning brown hair for a rabbit hopping through the brush? No, he'd be wearing that bright-red hunting cap. How about shooting him in the woods and taking his cap and vest back to Wilfred's house as if he hadn't worn them? No, that wouldn't do either . . .

Her thoughts ran in circles as she stared blindly at the pale-green kitchen wall. Her cigarette burned to ash in the bronze tray and her coffee grew cold; she hardly noticed when Ben returned and put a weighty little box into the pocket of his gun case.

"I should have got them uptown at noon," he mumbled. "Bream's had nothing but hollow point in long rifle size. I don't like them in the repeater. The only solid bullets they had were .22 shorts, and shorts aren't powerful enough." He stepped toward her. "I wish you'd listen, sometimes."

"Oh, I'm sorry." She looked up, smiling. "What did you say?"

"I said— Never mind, it doesn't make much difference. Is there any more coffee?"

But next morning, driving the forty miles from the city to Wilfred's place, Ben seemed unusually quiet and preoccupied. After several attempts to make conversation, Janet gave up and watched the autumn scenery. It was a perfect October day, still, sun-drenched, silent—and all the more so when they arrived at Wilfred's farm. Just the kind of place you might expect ten miles from the highway, at the end of a gravelly road through the bush: piles of firewood, logs, and pulpwood between the old house and the weatherbeaten barn; a few cattle grazing in the fields; the forest flaunting autumn whichever way you turned; the solitude pressing on you, enhanced by the feeble plume of wood smoke rising from the chimney into the clean still air.

Wilfred, a rangy bachelor with a long bony face and black hair graying at the temples, came striding around the house with a basket of shiny apples. He grinned at Janet hesitantly.

"I'm glad you asked us out, Wilfred," she said, smiling at him.

"I'm glad you came."

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She frowned, suddenly uneasy. Had Ben lied about Wilfred phoning him at the office? Was it the other way about? Or had she imagined his brief hesitation? Yes, she must have . . .

They had tea, scones, and honey in a large bare-looking kitchen whose only concessions to modern living were the telephone, radio, and refrigerator. As the men talked, she became aware of tiny echoes whispering in the lonely house and she thought of the ratty little apartment where she and Carmel had been raised by a befuddled mother who neither knew nor cared which end was up.

Mother was long gone, and a good thing too. Carmel had made it on her own, was a success, and still free. But she, poor fool, had married for money, for the security money would bring . . .

"I'm after a porcupine this time, Wilf," Ben was saying. "I've never seen one close up."

"You'll find them on the ground as much as in trees this time of year," Wilfred said—then, unwittingly, cleared the path for murder: they must see the cattle and his new pasture before he left for a co-op meeting.

He led them outdoors, down the bark-littered lane between the woodpiles, past the barn to the pasture gate. Here, leaning on the rails, pointing to various plants in the thick sward, he talked at length about the advantages of improved grass and legume mixtures.

His monologue, the stillness, the mellow warmth of the sun, made her drowsy. She yawned at the glorious scarlet and gold of the forested hills, and then found herself staring at the salt lick Wilfred had put out for his cattle.

A tapered blue block, hard as stone, weighing about fifty pounds, it lay on its side three feet inside the barbed-wire fence. The round hole in the larger end, two inches wide and five inches deep to accommodate the picket from which the cattle had butted it, faced her like a dark eye.

She looked away, and found her gaze drawn irresistibly back. An idea began to form. She shivered, tugged away, and followed the men back up the lane to see the cattle.

When they returned to the house, she felt like crying because she knew she couldn't do it. It had all been wishful thinking, brought on by childish resentment. She must have been crazy to think such thoughts! Thank God she had come to her senses in time!

Ben, out in the back yard, target-practicing with his slide-

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action repeater and new box of shells, was a good gentle man, worthy of better than she. She would be a better wife from now on. The minute Wilfred left, she would give Ben some indication of her new regard, might even hint about the children he had so long desired.

But when Wilfred did leave for his co-op meeting, bouncing down the dusty road in his battered old truck, she found Ben's attitude subtly changed. He was balanced on the balls of his feet, a trace of the bulldog in the line of his jaw. "Wilf'll be gone four hours, I imagine," he said, with obvious satisfaction.

He was looking at her in a curious manner; not at her eyes or her face, but, it seemed, at her head. Where had she seen that disconcerting gaze before—that intent yet unfocused gaze, as if he were looking through her to some object beyond? Nervously, she turned and entered the house.

"Come on," he said, following. "Let's take our guns and get going."

"I don't feel like hunting now," she said.

"Oh, come on," he urged, and there was something in his voice that made her draw back from him, a hint of breathlessness, of hidden excitement.

"All right then," she said, and went to get her rifle from its case. She put a bullet in the chamber, the other nine in her slacks pocket. He loaded his repeater and worked the slide action, advancing a cartridge to the chamber, cocking the firing-pin in readiness. She preceded him through the door.

She was blinking against the autumn sunlight when the realization hit her. Not for one minute had she fooled him with her deceitful wifely acquiescences and loving smiles. He knew her for what she was. *He* meant to kill *her!*

A dozen rushing thoughts supported this conviction against the incredulity of Ben doing such a thing:

This was the first time he had not insisted that they wear their blaze-orange vests!

If his hair was brown as a rabbit's, hers was black as a porcupine's! He had mentioned a porcupine to Wilfred in order to set the stage for murder!

He had phoned Wilfred from his office, not vice-versa, to get them out here, and he seemed to have known Wilfred would be at a meeting!

He had, in public, been increasingly attentive and loving of

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late, to show people how happily married they were.

It had all begun when Carmel made those commercials for Wetherson's. There had been something between them all along. It was Carmel he wanted!

He saw things coming before they happened, he said. Did that mean he knew what she intended when he had bought the rifles?

Her scalp seemed ready to lift from her skull with the fear that rose inside her, but not by the twitch of an eyelid did she show it. Holding the trigger back, she cocked her single-shot rifle silently, to be on even terms without his knowing. If he points that rifle at me just once, she thought, I'll drill him through the foot!

She couldn't kill him. Nobody would believe a story of self-defense against kindly respectable Ben.

Instantly, she realized a startling disadvantage. Being right-handed, she shot more naturally toward the left. A time-consuming half turn was necessary to shoot to the right. She couldn't take that chance. Casually, going down the slope from the house, she stepped around him.

In a way it was the final test, because he was right-handed too. A few paces later, when he stepped to her right in turn, there was no doubt left in her mind. She *knew*, and knew also that it was useless to balk or run. He could shoot her here just as easily and claim accidental discharge of the gun. And he would get away with it.

She forced in a ragged breath, pretended to stumble on the rough ground, and again came up on his right. A few seconds later, he copied her movement. "Will you quit shuttling around?" he mumbled. "What's gotten into you anyway?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "I just wanted to be on the sunny side."

The sunny side! Even as she said it she realized his plan—he was fixing their relative positions now so that when they entered the woods later she, on his left, would be blinded by the barred sunlight of the bush and he would have perfect vision.

It seemed impossible that this was happening in this perfectly peaceful countryside. Yet accidents did happen on soporific days like this. That boy last year, mistaken for a partridge. The man shot while eating lunch because some idiot thought the waxed paper from his sandwich was the flag of a deer. In each case, the culprits had merely had their licenses revoked for three years

She sneaked a sideways look at Ben. He seemed flushed. That might be because of the red woollen shirt and cap he was wear-

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ing, but it didn't explain his intense expression. A cold light glinted on the blued barrel of his rifle with every step he took.

Fear became terror. His rifle! she thought wildly. She must get it away from him!

She could hardly walk for the trembling of her legs nor think for the roaring in her ears. They passed the barn in silence. At the pasture gate the salt lick caught her eye and she stopped.

"Oh," she gasped. "We forgot our vests! Wait, I'll get them!" She propped her rifle against the fence and raced back toward the house, her shiny hair bouncing.

"We don't need them this close to the house!" he shouted after her.

"The law says we do!" She charged into the house and donned her own vest before grabbing his and trotting back to him.

"Here." She passed it to him and held his gun, backing slowly away while he tied the tapes . . .

"Damn you!" she cried when he looked up, his rifle firm in her hands. "Kill me, will you?" She thumbed the safety off and crouched low, the rifle pointed at his astounded face.

"What!" His eyes bulged in disbelief. "Put that gun down, you fool!"

"I'm not that big a fool," she said, and fired . . .

She wiped the rifle free of fingerprints with his fallen cap, then made his hands grasp and fondle it, and gave his wrists a flip to drop it beside him. No murder. An accident. But only if the picket hole in that salt lick fifteen feet away carried the mark of a ricocheting bullet.

It was ticklish. A bullet fired into that round-bottomed cavity would return with undiminished velocity and nearly, even possibly exactly, on the same line. Breathing shallowly, she lay on the grass beside Ben, aimed her rifle, fired, and knew the soundness of her scheme when the bullet screamed back, inches over her head. She rose and walked the distance to the house, ejecting the spent shell into the long grass on the way.

She cleaned her rifle thoroughly and returned it to its case with the remaining shells from her pocket. She removed her bright vest and folded it neatly over the gun case. She brushed the front of her sweater and slacks, washed her hands, and sat down to wait. Ben had gone hunting. She must not find him too soon.

Time crept by. The kettle moaned briefly and was silent.

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Gradually, her heart resumed its normal beat.

She had done what she wanted to do. A perfect job. Not the keenest policeman nor the smartest insurance investigator would detect the ruse. The bullet in Ben's head would carry the marks of his own gun. Even the orange vest he wore was no longer a drawback but a prop, verifying an accident. But if she didn't have an excuse for staying in the house, she might be in trouble.

She put wood in the cast-iron stove and cleared a space on the oak cupboard to make and roll out pastry for pies. She peeled the apples Wilfred had picked, found brown sugar in a bean crock, and searched the shelves for spices. Soon, flushed with heat, a towel about her waist, she began humming to herself.

When she ran out of pie plates, she made a pan of apple dumplings and swept the worn linoleum of the floor. Eventually she went to the pantry window and looked out. She saw Wilfred's cattle standing in a semicircle beyond the salt lick, motionless, staring at the dead man with heads lowered.

It was all the excuse she needed. Minutes later, she was flying back from Ben's stiffened form. With shaking hands and voice, she phoned the county police.

When the cruiser came and the two policemen got out, she let nervous tension pass for anguish by making an obvious struggle for composure.

She didn't mind the younger officer with the notepad and pen but she feared instinctively the big heavy man with the dark saturnine face and cold gray eyes which swept her from head to toe. "Mrs. Morlin? What happened?"

She told them. She hadn't known a thing until the curious behavior of the cattle drew her attention. She led them to the spot with awkward steps. Yes, they knew Wilfred. They knew everybody in these parts.

They studied the layout, the position of the body, before the big cop knelt and held Ben's wrist for a moment. He scrutinized Ben's face. "He didn't shoot himself. No powder burns. That your husband's rifle, ma'am?"

"Yes, that's Ben's gun."

"Another hunting accident?" the young cop asked.

"I don't see how. He's wearing the orange, and the bush is two hundred yards away. Could have been hit by a stray bullet, but the chances are a million to one against. This looks like murder."

He stood up, dark and massive. "A big-game bullet would have

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ripped his head apart. That hole suggests .22 caliber rimfire ammunition. Did you see any strangers, hear any shots, ma'am?"

"None. But I was indoors all afternoon."

"Indoors? On a day like this? Why?"

"It was Ben's idea. He wanted to shoot a porcupine and said I should bake some pies for his cousin. We were to go hunting when he returned. Toward evening was better for rabbits, he said."

"You also own a .22, then?"

"Yes, of course. A single-shot. It's in the house." Anxiety gripped her. Would they never notice that salt lick? Must she take them by the hands and lead them to it, show them the leaden streak in its cavity? "I wouldn't have noticed firing anyway. Ben was always shooting, at anything and everything. Tin cans, bottles, rocks, stumps, anything in sight."

"A plinker, eh? It's a dangerous habit. So when Wilfred left, you two were alone?"

"As far as I know." Her breath caught in her throat. The man's granite eyes were searching the immediate vicinity, stopping, appraising, moving on, remote with thought. They passed the salt lick, wavered, and returned. Her knees almost gave way with relief.

The cattle straggled off when they let down the rails of the gate. The big policeman examined the stone-hard block, sighted along it, checked the elevation caused by its tapered sides, and shook his head doubtfully. He pursed his lips, peered into the deep cavity again, and returned to Ben's body.

Her nerves tingled. Would he buy it? If he didn't—but how could he doubt the evidence before his eyes?

He glanced at her, then, rubbing his jaw, stood behind Ben and studied the block from that direction. He drew his revolver, aimed at the dark hole in the salt lick, and held the pose for several seconds. He nodded slowly and reholstered his gun.

"I'll be damned," he muttered. "An accident. A stupid freak accident. Straight as a die. Because he didn't think.

"That hole looks like a bull's-eye from here. A real temptation to any plinker. I guess he didn't realize it's shaped like a miniature cannon, and round-bottomed to boot. You can see where the bullet struck inside and came back to kill him. I'm sorry, ma'am."

"Oh, my God," she whispered. "He should have known better than to shoot at a thing like that. If he had only thought—"

"They never do." The young cop replaced the gate rails. . .

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Wilfred, home from his meeting, stood silent near the pasture gate, looking from Ben to Janet to the policemen.

The older man, picking up Ben's rifle, said, "The most dangerous caliber ever made." He ejected the empty shell, then a live one onto his palm. "Cheap ammunition and lack of recoil promotes carelessness. Yet these little bullets—" He stopped; suddenly wary, his gray eyes piercing. "Hollow point?" He held the cartridge out between thumb and forefinger. "Hollow point! This man was murdered!"

"Hollow point?" Janet swayed, chilled to the heart.

"Mushroom. It would disintegrate on impact, fired into the picket hole of that block. It wouldn't return in a solid chunk to drill that hole in his forehead. Somebody else did that. In as pretty a set-up as I've ever encountered."

He jumped the gate lightly for so big a man. He turned the cavity of the salt lick toward the sun for keener inspection, and came back slowly, staring at her. "I make it a single mark, in and out from the bottom. No flaking signs of splattered lead. That indicates a solid slug. Do you use solid bullets, ma'am?"

There was no sense denying it against those they'd find in the pocket of her gun case. "Yes," she said, her entire body numb.

"And you heard no shots? This is a quiet day. A secluded place." He emptied Ben's rifle, counted the cartridges. "Ten. All hollow point. Only one shot fired after loading. Not necessarily by him nor at any particular target. One shot *had* to be fired from this gun to make it look like a freak accident."

"But that first bullet!" she gasped. "The fired one! It must have been a solid bullet! Left over from a previous box! It could have been—" her voice trailed off.

She was caught. They wouldn't find a solid bullet in Ben's head.

She looked down at him, saw the brown blood crusted on his gray forehead, then looked to the glowing hills around, serene under the blue October sky.

The older policeman's face softened with something like regret. He stepped forward, cupped her elbow gently. "Please, ma'am—"

She jerked away. "Take your hands off me!" she cried, and stalked toward the waiting cruiser with blind fury in her heart against all men who mumbled.

Look what Ben's mumbling had cost her. Real bars this time.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 439th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" . . . homicide with humor, or in Will Cuppy's famous phrase, "murder without tears"—one of the most difficult challenges to the mystery writer, and how satisfyingly this new writer meets that challenge! . . .

The author, C. B. Labrid, contributed to her high school and college publications "aeons ago," has sold crossword puzzles to "The New York Times," guessing games to juvenile magazines, and captions to greeting-card companies. She has been an interviewer for the Louis Harris public-opinion surveys, has a golfing husband, two sons in college, and a dog and three cats at home. Her "adorations": her family, sailing a Sunflower, artichokes, Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, and "staying at the dinner table for hours with companionable people. But more than anything on God's earth," she loves "to sit at the typewriter in delicious torment." Our editorial chips are on C.B. Labrid: those "delicious torments" will turn into "delicious 'tecs"—wait and see! . . .

GOLF WIDOW

by C. B. LABRID

It took Letitia 20 years to plan the demise of her beloved husband. She'd found it difficult to concentrate while the children were still at home—Letitia liked to tackle one project at a time.

"Probably play only nine this evening, dear," Alfred said, bestowing a dutiful peck on her cheek.

"Hmm," she answered, voicing her usual enthusiasm for his hobby.

Daylight savings time was ending and, with that, Alfred's last opportunity for his daily after-work round of golf.

His *very* last, thought Letitia, and smiled. . .

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Having determined soon after the wedding that their marriage was heading for the rough, she began her research while honeymooning. Letitia's intellect did not qualify as an asset, so to compensate for that deficiency she made lists.

Over the years, with the public library as her source, she had filled a notebook with strategic information. In the past six months she had correlated her data. The result was about to make her a well-to-do widow.

Studying Georges Simenon, she realized that murderers could be revealed through their personalities. So she trained herself to laugh, rather than cry, over her husband's devotion to that hateful little white ball. She even joked about the first morning of their honeymoon, when he had leaped out of bed at sunup for "a fast nine" before breakfast.

She checked police procedure in Ed McBain and Dell Shannon, noting incidentally the danger of gossip by friends, neighbors, and relatives. Accordingly, Letitia presented herself to everyone—even to her mother—as the happiest of wives.

"Oh, Alfred *does* swing," she would simper, "but only on the golf course!"

Reading Isaac Asimov, she learned caution about minute details. Her notebook, cached in the case of her sewing machine, was soft covered and contained no metal or plastic. Now that her plan was operative, she could cut up the pages and flush that evidence down the toilet. Attention to detail!

She had outlined her project, just as she'd been taught in school. Her working title was "Alfred's Last Stance."

Under the heading, *when*, she had penciled in question marks. And once, during their seventh year, she had happily written: "Perhaps never, after all."

On that occasion Alfred had actually canceled his golf date and spent an entire Sunday with her. The pleasure of his company was only slightly marred by the nature of their activity—salvaging the remains of their house, which had burned down the previous night.

As things turned out, however, Alfred chose a new home directly across from the seventh green. At twice the price of the house Letitia had wanted in town.

She resumed her project, printing clearly under *when* in her scorched notebook: "As soon as possible."

Where was no problem. The logical location, now so handy, of-

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fered a minimum of six thousand landscaped yards.

How remained a blank page for years.

She researched the use of firearms. People who wanted to shoot someone seemed always to *have* their weapons. She could find no example of a middle-aged housewife shopping for a gun.

She considered a knife. In her 20 years of preparing meals she was still slashing her own fingers nearly every time she disjointed a chicken. No, stabbing was not her forte.

Something neat and quiet, Letitia mused. She read more Rex Stout and Agatha Christie and Erle Stanley Gardner.

Eventually, underneath *how*, Letitia wrote: "Poison."

Her choice was sustained by Dr. Wood's ad in the local newspaper. He needed a receptionist for his veterinary hospital. There were serums in his lab strong enough to kill a bull—surely there would be something appropriate for Alfred.

Letitia worked almost a year for Dr. Wood before finding the suitable poison. It was effective on humans, tasteless, powerful enough to require only half an ounce for a lethal dose. These facts she elicited during casual and innocent conversations.

Another two years of infrequent access to the drug cabinet and she had siphoned out, one drop at a time, the necessary amount. She stored her supply in an empty perfume flaçon.

Alfred made the *How* easy for her. Like most golfers, he relished the euphemistic nineteenth hole. But soon after Labor Day the clubhouse would shut down and the only beverages available were cans of soda pop from the vending machine. Hardly spirited enough for Alfred!

So he began to carry a flask in his golf bag. When the pro shop closed for the season he kept his clubs in the garage. Each night he readied his equipment, including the flask, so that he would waste no time getting out to the course on his return home from work the next day.

That morning, had Letitia been seen leaving the garage, it would have been observed that she held a completely empty perfume flaçon and wore an expression similar to that of the Mona Lisa.

She'd known that nothing short of a chance to caddy for Arnold Palmer or Jack Nicklaus would prevent Alfred from playing golf that afternoon. The last day before resumption of standard time—as everyone was told, within five minutes of meeting him,

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it was on this day in 1950 that Alfred had shot a hole in one.

How sportsmanlike, thought Letitia, that *his* lucky day should now become *mine*.

She read her notebook for the last time. In the bathroom she carefully cut each page into tiny pieces and watched them flutter into the toilet. She was about to flush when she heard a voice on the porch.

He couldn't have played nine holes so soon!

"Mrs. Compton! This is George, Mrs. Compton. Please open the door."

George? One of the men in Alfred's foursome.

Letitia went to the door.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Compton. I'm so sorry!"

"What in the world—?" Letitia asked.

"It's your husband, Mrs. Compton—it's Al—he—he—"

"What *is* it?"

"I hate to have to tell you—I'm so sorry—it must have been a heart attack!"

Letitia looked convincingly shocked.

"Right on the seventh green," George sputtered, "right there across the street!"

She'd always suspected that Alfred emptied his flask long before the game was over. What justice! He didn't even get to finish the front nine!

"What happened, you see, he *aced* the hole! Imagine that, Mrs. Compton? All these years—wanting to get a hole in one again—and on the same day as that first time!"

George had taken her arm and was leading her toward the golf course.

"Oh, Alfred, my dear Alfred," Letitia moaned.

The other two men were standing by his body. They mumbled comforting words to her.

Letitia looked down at her dead husband. To her amazement she felt dizzy. Her knees trembled. She'd never fainted in her life, but—

"Grab her, George! She's falling!"

"The poor woman—"

"Wow! She really passed out!"

"Here, rest her head on my golf bag."

"This is awful, George. We've got to tell her the truth."

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"Are you crazy? And have her say we murdered him?"

"Come on! Who could have known a hole in one would give him a heart attack? That's not murder!"

"It is when you think how we tricked him—"

"But it was a joke—just a joke! He'd have laughed about it himself!"

"Sure, he knew we were sick of listening to him tell about his ace in 1950."

"Listen, we kept him busy in the rough hunting for our hook shots. You dropped his ball into the cup. And that makes all three of us responsible for his heart attack."

"Okay, maybe we are to blame for a stupid practical joke. But that isn't *murder*! And think about this—when Al walked up to this green and realized his ball was in the cup, he was as happy as a man can be! Why, he was in Heaven *before* his heart stopped! Could any duffer ask for a better way to go?"

"Well. . ."

"Listen, we'd better do something about his wife."

"I'll get Al's flask out of his bag. That stuff ought to bring her around."

"Sure. Hold up her head, George, while I pour this into her."

"Come on, Mrs. Compton, drink this down. It'll do you good."

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 440th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Jamie was the youngest of the elevator "boys," but not too young to want a piece of the action . . .

The author, S. L. Burns, has been a writer for more than ten years—on the staff of the "New York Herald Tribune," then on "Scholastic Magazine," and currently as a freelance. But until now all S. L. Burns's published writing has been nonfiction. "The Man in 13-B" is the author's first plunge into fiction.

If S. L. Burns has a hobby, "it is the time-consuming one of dog-walking." The author has "often thought that being a dog-walker is a perfect disguise for snoopers, legal and illegal. It is a good excuse for loitering at all hours and in strange places." Would EQMM be interested "in a story about a rather fussy busybody attached to a dog—one of those people who notice everything, who spend their idle moments at the other end of the leash speculating about other people's business?" We would indeed be interested in a dog-walker detective . . .

THE MAN IN 13-B

by S. L. BURNS

It was strange about the man in 13-B. Jamie never saw him in the elevator. Neither did any of the other boys who worked in the building. "Boys." That's what they called each other, but Jamie thought he was the youngest of them all. He wondered if he, too, would still be wearing a cap and white gloves at the age of 65.

The "boys" used to meet at the coffee machine in the basement. Sometimes when Jamie arrived, one of the day men was still there, changing his clothes and talking about "the one horse" or "the five"—the horse he should have bet, wanted to bet, and would have bet if one of the other boys had not thrown him off it by a chance remark. Jamie found out from the others what hap-

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pened in the building while he was off duty.

No one else ever saw the man in 13-B on the elevator, either. A grocery boy in a white jacket delivered cartons of food to 13-B. The cartons, Jamie saw, were stacked with TV dinners. A man from the dry cleaner delivered 13-B's suits, which hung over the delivery man's shoulder from a crooked finger. Anyone could see through the clear plastic covers that the suits were not very expensive. "I'd never live that way if *I* had the money for Park Avenue," said Jamie to the day man.

"Neither would I," said the day man. Both fell into a dreamy silence.

If I had the money, thought Jamie. Would he ever be able to get out of this uniform? He had taken the four-to-midnight shift originally because he wanted to go to night school. He had signed up for an accounting course. He was beginning to understand the flow of money now. But he felt like a hunter in the forest without a gun. As an accountant, he could track his quarry as it moved from place to place, but he could not bring it down. He was no closer to capturing some money for himself.

Jamie reflected on the perversity of money, which stuck to those who didn't use it or those who didn't seem to need it or even to enjoy it. For them, money sat around and multiplied with biblical fruitfulness. But for people like Jamie, money just dwindled, grew thin, and expired in moments of stress.

Shortly after four, when Jamie took his station by the door, the tenants began returning. Some came in cabs, with tight faces, their briefcases full of work. Some toiled from the bus or subway stop. Others floated in from cocktails. All seemed preoccupied. Their thoughts were turned inward, and the view there seemed to depress them. Jamie soon learned that this was a bad time to try to start a conversation.

The post-dinner crowd was always more cheerful. Some of them noticed him and joshed or smiled. Usually, though, neither tenants nor visitors spared a glance at the elevator men in uniform. Nevertheless, Jamie knew a great deal about the people who didn't look at him.

He knew about the woman in 4-B, for instance. She was a juicer. She sat on the back stairs with a bottle between her knees while her husband watched television. Did he really think she was doing the dishes all that time? For a while the boys kept track of how many bottles they took out in the trash from 4-B.

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Jamie knew that 7-D was out of a job and worried about it. He received unemployment checks and carried in his own groceries. No tips from him. 6-A's boy friend had walked out on her. She was wondering how to pay the bills too. She spent many evenings in a nearby bar. Good luck to her. The old man in the penthouse was off his nut. Round-the-clock nurses for him, and a regular visit from the trustee at the bank.

But no one knew anything about the man in 13-B.

Then, late one evening, 13-B called Jamie upstairs. No one else was in the lobby. Jamie was too curious to wait for the other man to return from a trip to the basement. He locked the front door while he took the elevator up.

13-B was standing at his door when Jamie arrived. He was a middle-sized man with a bland white face like the face of a clock with the works concealed behind it. He was in shirt sleeves. "I'd like you to do something for me, if you will," said 13-B politely.

"Yes, *sir*," said Jamie eagerly. His hand went automatically to his hat in a semi-salute.

"Someone may ask about me," said 13-B. "I'm a man who appreciates his privacy." He unfolded a wallet and slid out some bills. "If anyone should ask you, I'd like you to say that apartment 13-B is empty."

"Absolutely," said Jamie. "13-B is empty. Got it."

The man nodded, smiled, and softly shut the door. Then Jamie realized he had seen nothing of 13-B's interior.

Before he started the elevator down, Jamie counted the bills. $50! Now that was a tip! The biggest by far he'd ever received.

Jamie soon heard that the other boys had been tipped too. They all liked 13-B now. They nicknamed him "Mr. Big."

A few days later two men came to the front door of the building. Jamie was standing under the canopy, enjoying the air. He saw them striding up the sidewalk, unhurried, about a foot apart. They looked as though they were used to working together. It must have been the way they walked without bumping or conversing. Each seemed to know the other's intent. Cops, thought Jamie.

The two men stopped under the canopy. "Tell us who lives on the 13th floor," the shorter one said.

Jamie told them about the tenants in 13-A, 13-C, and 13-D.

"A and B are in the front, C and D in the back?" asked the taller one.

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"That's right," said Jamie.

"What about 13-B?"

"Nobody lives there," said Jamie. "The apartment's empty."

"The City Directory shows the name of a couple," said the smaller one. "Are they away on vacation?"

"No. Nobody lives there. The couple moved out a few months ago. The apartment hasn't been rented."

The two men looked at each other. Then they continued up the street. They seemed satisfied.

But Jamie started to think about it. I lied for 13-B, he thought. I stuck my neck out. What if those cops find out I lied? What would they do to me? Jamie had a mental picture of the subway station where he waited for a train every night after midnight. He saw himself alone. And then he saw two figures approach him, one on either side, handcuffs out, and ready to arrest him.

Jamie quickly turned off that picture. A young woman tenant, pulled by a leaping spaniel, was trying to maneuver her baby carriage through the door. Jamie jumped forward to help her. Then he received a package from a delivery man and shook it when nobody was looking. He whistled for cabs. He ran energetically to the curb to fling open the doors of arriving cars. He was too uneasy to stand still.

Finally, at the end of his shift, Jamie thought, I got fifty bucks for lying. Whatever 13-B is up to, it must be worth a lot more than $50 to keep quiet about it.

The next evening, during the lull after dinner, Jamie locked the front door. He took the elevator to the 13th floor and knocked on the door of 13-B. When the door opened, the man in 13-B raised his eyebrows inquiringly. "Yes?" he said

Jamie told him about the two men who had asked questions. He told 13-B about his answers. Then he took a deep breath. "They smelled like cops to me. Whatever your game is, man," Jamie said, "I want a cut of it."

The eyes of 13-B narrowed while he inspected Jamie's face. Jamie's heart quaked. He wondered if he had gone too far.

Then the man said, "Okay. I can use you." He thought for a minute. "See if you can get on the night shift. There *is* something you can do for me. I'll give you your instructions after you've made the switch."

Jamie traded off with the night man for a week. Now his shift

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was midnight to eight. In the small hours the night man usually took off his shoes and stretched out on the lobby sofa. This self-awarded "perk" made up for the boredom of the night shift. Sometimes the tenants complained how hard it was to rouse the night man when they came home late.

But Jamie had to stay awake and stand in the foyer. He stood there with his cap on his head and his whistle in his pocket until he thought his legs would turn to wood.

Then one shift at three in the morning, when even the street lights looked dim and lonely, he saw a car stop in front of the entrance to the building across the street. Jamie was ready. He put the whistle between his teeth and walked out into the street. There were few cars to be seen. He looked downtown as if for a taxi. He looked uptown. He looked through the windows of the stopped car.

A group of men was moving slowly through the lobby of the building across the street. They were moving close together. As they neared the door, Jamie saw that there was a girl in the middle of the group. That was the tipoff the man in 13-B had given him.

Jamie blew his whistle. Then everything happened at once. Men came running out of doorways up and down the street with guns in their hands. The group of men stopped, then tried to turn back. Someone darted in and grabbed the girl's arm. She staggered as he pulled her roughly. Then another man ran past with his arm held straight out, football style. Guns fired. Jamie felt a pain in his arm.

A man ran past Jamie and across the street. He was the man from 13-B. He put his arm around the girl and pulled her away down the sidewalk. Others were fighting in the building and on the street. Jamie's arm hurt. He walked back into his building.

Through the gold-etched glass of the outer door he watched. Suddenly everything was quiet. Men were being lined up, facing the wall. Others picked themselves up slowly from the concrete. Police cars swung up to the curb. They must have been waiting around the corner, Jamie thought. For a few minutes they blocked the street. Then the police loaded the cars and took everyone away.

The man from 13-B came back to Jamie's building. He was smiling. His arms were swinging as he leaped for sheer pleasure from the pavement to the sidewalk.

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"What happened, man?" asked Jamie. He was holding his arm. Blood was dripping off the fingers.

"You wanted a piece of my action," 13-B said. "You got it. I've been watching that house for weeks. Those men were kidnapers. We didn't dare go in after the girl. We were waiting for them to take her out. I knew it would have to be this week, most likely at night."

He laughed and clapped his hands like a boy. "Bull's-eye!" he said. "You did a good job, Jamie. Now I'll put that crowd away so long they won't remember what a dollar bill looks like." He pointed to Jamie's bleeding arm. "Let's go take care of that. I'm the cop, Jamie. That's the game you wanted a cut of."

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a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

It was inevitable that Stella Crump, knitting beside her husband at the stadium, would compare him with dear Francis—Francis X. Lafferty, inspirational lecturer on contentment.

There was no comparison. . .

THE SEASON TICKET HOLDER

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

The stadium sat like a huge frosted doughnut on the rim of the river. Mrs. Stella Crump, trotting resentfully beside her husband, wished that a giant hand would swoop out of the overhanging clouds and dunk it into the coffee-colored water. Instead, a strong gust of wind swept across the walkway, disarranging Mrs. Crump's carefully tinted and lacquered hair. The pennants on top of the stadium snapped and fluttered. Mrs. Crump shrieked and stopped in her tracks to tie a purple scarf over her ruined hairdo. Mr. Owen Crump waited impatiently, while the crowd surged around them, eager to reach their seats before the final recorded strains of the national anthem died away.

"Hurry up, Stella! Why don't you wear that nice red hat I got for you?"

"Because I hate red and that hat looks like a squashed soup-bowl."

"Come on, Stella. We've already missed the starting lineup."

"What difference does it make? They all look alike to me. Wait a minute. I've got something in my shoe." Mrs. Crump limped to the side of the walkway, methodically removed one shoe, shook it out, felt gingerly inside it, and replaced it on her foot.

The crowd had thinned out and a roar sounded from inside the stadium. An amplified mumble could be heard making an announcement. Owen Crump took his wife's arm and hauled her at a half-run toward the stadium gates.

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"Not so fast, Owen," she whimpered, "I've got a pain in my side. I want to stop at the ladies' room. Wait for me."

By the time they reached their seats, the opposing team had two men on and their most powerful batter was approaching the plate. Owen Crump began hastily filling in his score card, while Stella ostentatiously pulled out her knitting, a complicated mass of cables and popcorns, and began furiously clacking her needles.

The count was three and two, and the batter had just popped a foul into the stands behind home plate.

Stella said, "I'm thirsty. I'd like a soda."

Owen, leaning forward in his seat and ready to groan in dismay if the batter connected, muttered, "In a minute, Stella."

"I'm thirsty *now*, Owen. The least you can do after dragging me out here is get me something to drink. I don't think that's too much to ask for. I'd go myself, but I've still got that pain in my side."

"All right. All right. Here." He handed her the score card. "Keep track of what happens." As Owen rose from his seat, the umpire signaled ball four, and the players walked. The bases were loaded, with no outs.

Stella peered down at the field through her bifocals, shook her head scornfully, and stuffed the score card into the bottom of her knitting bag. Owen raced up the stairs toward the refreshment counter, staring over his shoulder as he went.

As the crowd in the stadium tensely waited the next batter, Stella settled back in her seat to knit and rehearse her grievances. Bad enough, she thought, that we used to have to see every weekend game. But now that Owen had retired, he'd bought season tickets. This year he intended to see every home game. And Stella would see them too. Oh, she could stay home, tend to her knitting, visit their daughter and the grandchildren. But where was the fun in that when Owen would be here at the stadium enjoying himself without her?

The umpire called ball one.

Stella completed an intricate cable and her needles worked rapidly toward the next pattern. No. If Stella didn't go to the ball games, Owen would take some crony and they would drink too much beer and eat those filthy hot dogs, and he would come home flushed and overexcited and more than slightly drunk. This way, at least, she could keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't overdo things. He was just like a little boy. Stella smiled grimly

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and considered herself extremely noble for sacrificing her summer afternoons and evenings.

The batter swung and missed but Stella was oblivious.

It wasn't as if she didn't have better things to do. Stella's thoughts strayed over all the better things she could be doing. They all involved Owen's money and Francis X. Lafferty. Dear, sensitive, handsome, refined, perceptive Francis.

Stella had met Francis X. Lafferty almost a year ago when he'd come to address the Garden Club on the subject of "Flowers of Contentment." Someone at the speaker's bureau had got their signals mixed. Francis X. Lafferty knew nothing of gardening, but his talk was well received all the same. It was inspirational without being embarrassing. Mr. Lafferty's melodious voice caressed the ears of his listeners, and no one felt obliged to rush off and do good works, or be kind to animals, lose weight, or stop drinking sherry. The ladies loved Francis X. Lafferty and flocked to buy copies of his slim, privately printed book. Stella smiled again, this time fondly, wishing that she could help dear Francis in his desire to travel across the country, indeed around the world, spreading his message. Preferably with Stella at his side.

Down on the field, the pitcher threw an inside curve and was rewarded with a called strike, but Stella was miles away, touring the great cities of the world and witnessing the peace and contentment that dear Francis would bring to troubled hearts everywhere.

It was inevitable that Stella would compare Francis X. Lafferty and Owen Crump. There was no comparison. While the stands grew restless and erupted in cries of encouragement to the pitcher, Stella knitted on and totted up a mental ledger. On the one side, dear Francis, although far from the first blush of youth, was young at heart. He viewed the world with enthusiasm and made all dreams seem possible. Owen had for forty years viewed life from the confines of the paper-box factory whose finances he had guided and guarded until the day of his retirement. Paper boxes had been good to Owen, but the years of poring over balance sheets and operating statements had left him bald, stoop-shouldered, and paunchy. Dear Francis stood straight and slim and silver-maned, and had a most imposing presence on the speaker's platform. Owen shambled and told coarse jokes in mixed company. On the other hand, Owen had been clever about investments while dear Francis, through his devotion to his mis-

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sion, had admittedly neglected the crasser side of life's potential. It was a problem.

Stella looked up from her knitting as a sharp crack split the expectant air and the crowd went wild. Dimly, she saw a small white object fly through the air and land in an outstretched glove.

"Here's your drink. What happened?" Owen plumped himself down beside her.

"I don't know. Somebody caught a ball. That fellow over there, I think it was." Stella gestured vaguely toward the outfield.

"Where's my score card?"

"Oh, dear. Did I have it? I must have dropped it." Stella bent to look under the seats. "Not there. Are you sure you gave it to me? I'm not sure you did."

"Never mind. I'll get another one."

Throughout the rest of the game, while Owen cheered and heckled and added his voice to the communal warcry of "Charge!" Stella knitted and dreamed of faraway places, fame and glory for dear Francis, and herself, the treasured companion, making it all come true through Owen's money. The sweater she knitted was to be a birthday present for Francis. It was the least she could do.

The following Sunday was Bat Day.

Owen had said, "I'd like to take Ronnie to the game. It's time he got his first baseball bat. Would you mind missing this one game?"

"Oh, I think I'll survive. Maybe I'll have some of the girls in for tea." Stella's mind leaped to her invitation list. It was a short one.

"Cackle session, huh? Just be sure the hens have flown the coop before I get home." Owen chuckled and Stella smiled.

"Don't worry, dear," she said. "It'll all be over before the end of the ninth."

Early Sunday afternoon, Stella waved goodbye to Owen as he drove off to pick up their five-year-old grandson. As soon as he was out of sight down the winding drive, she hurried upstairs to dress for the tea party. A brand new blue-silk hostess gown hung ready in her closet. In her bathroom, snatches of old songs tinkled through her head while she smeared her face with a wrinkle-removing masque.

"April in Paris, Arrivederci Roma," she hummed. "I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China . . . ."

Under the masque her skin felt tight and clean and young. She

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wriggled into her sturdy girdle. Francis X. Lafferty had often remarked on the ugliness of girls who starved themselves into scarecrows. He liked a comfortable, womanly woman, he said. Still and all, Stella felt it was the better part of valor to keep her ample curves under control. The loose-fitting gown would help to minimize their magnificence.

To Stella, without her glasses, the wrinkle masque seemed to have performed as advertised. She made up carefully with just the right touch of blusher to her cheeks. Her eyelids matched the blue of her gown. When she cast her eyes down modestly, her false eyelashes tickled her cheekbones. A final cloud of hairspray, a few strategic dabs of cologne, and Stella felt regal and ready.

She swept down the carpeted stairs, pausing in mid-descent to peer at her domain. The heavy drapes were drawn against the harsh afternoon sun. The tea tray twinkled in the half-light on a low table set before the loveseat. Roses massed in a silver bowl sent their fragrance throughout the house swirling on the cool, centrally conditioned air. All that was needed was music.

Stella floated into the room, tingling with anticipation, and placed a stack of Mantovani records on the spindle of the stereo. Everything was perfect. Too bad Owen didn't appreciate her delicacy and good taste. He seldom came into this room and when he did he fidgeted about so clumsily that Stella feared for the safety of her collection of porcelain figurines. He left smelly cigar butts in her dainty china ashtrays. Just as well, she thought, that he preferred to spend his time in the basement rec room where he could smoke his filthy cigars and munch on limburger and onion sandwiches and watch television with his feet up on the furniture.

On the crest of the surging Mantovani strings, the doorbell rang. Stella peeped between the drawn drapes and saw dear Francis' ancient Volkswagen parked in the drive. Such an undignified car for such a truly noble person. Stella could visualize Francis behind the wheel of a Lincoln Continental, at the very least. She glided to the door, her stomach in and her chin high.

"Good afternoon, dear lady. This single rose is not more glorious in its bloom than she to whom I bring it."

"Oh, Mr. Lafferty. Francis. Dear me!" It crossed Stella's mind that the single rose bore a striking resemblance to those carefully nurtured and tended by her neighbor up the road. But she chased the traitorous notion away. After all, it was the thought that counted. "Won't you come in?"

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Stella took the proffered rose and promptly received a thorn in her thumb. She cried out in pain.

"What is it, dear lady? Does this envious rose dare to prick the thumb of beauty? Away with it!" Francis X. Lafferty snatched the stem from Stella and tossed it into the umbrella stand. "Let me see the wound. Ah, there. We'll have it well in no time."

A drop of bright blood appeared on Stella's thumb, and a gleaming white handkerchief materialized in Francis X. Lafferty's hand. His long fingers gently encircled her pudgy paw as he swaddled the injured thumb. Stella could have fainted with delight. She would gladly have bled gallons just to keep his hands holding hers.

"How thoughtless of me," he murmured. "I meant to bring you happiness and have caused you only pain."

"Oh, dear me. It doesn't hurt a bit. Well, hardly at all. And now your handkerchief is stained."

If Stella had been infatuated before, she was besotted as she examined Francis X. Lafferty's blood-spotted handkerchief—so clean, and of such fine linen. But laundered so often the threads had parted here and there. Her confined bosom heaved with the indignity of threadbare handkerchiefs and rackety old cars. Dear Francis should have nothing but the best. And she, Stella, would give it to him, could give it to him, if only Owen . . .

Stella giggled. Francis was pressing his warm lips to her hand.

"Oh, my goodness," she squealed. "Kiss it and make it well."

"If only I could, dear lady. If only I were free to kiss away all your cares. What joy it would give me to see the flowers of contentment bloom in your eyes. If I dared hope . . ."

"Ah, um," said Stella. "Shall we have some tea?"

Stella was rinsing teacups when Owen and Ronnie burst into the kitchen, dispelling her daydream of exotic ocean voyages with Francis X. Lafferty in the deck chair beside her. Dear Francis had done well by the petit fours, she noticed.

"We won, Grandma! We won!" shouted Ronnie, swinging his brand new bat.

"Nine to six!" exclaimed Owen. "What a game! You should have been there, Stella! Hey, what are you all dolled up for? That's some bathrobe you got on!"

"It's not a bathrobe. It's a hostess gown. I had a tea party. Remember?"

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"Oh, yeah. Well, go put your running shoes on, old girl, and let's play *ball*!"

"Me! Play ball! You must be out of your mind, Owen Crump."

"Play ball, Grandma! Let's play ball," cried Ronnie, thumping his bat on the floor.

"Aw, come on, Stella. I bought a baseball and Ronnie's got his new bat. Let's just hit a few out in the back yard."

"Please, Grandma. It's a real Louisville bat. Look at it!"

"Well, all right," said Stella. "But just for a few minutes. I've never played baseball."

Reluctantly, Stella ascended the stairs and dragged her old gardening clothes out of the closet. She could hear Owen out in the yard, giving Ronnie instructions on how to hold the bat, when to swing. How different her life could be, she thought, as she tied the laces of her tennis shoes. Oh, things were comfortable enough here. She really couldn't complain about that. But she'd never been anywhere or done anything really exciting. And Owen was so dull and boring, content to spend the rest of his life pottering about, going to ball games, having nights out with his cronies from the box factory. Stella knew that in Owen's hands their lives were safe and secure. But, oh, *so* predictable and dull.

"Stella! Hurry up! We're waiting for you."

"I'm coming," she muttered. "Baseball! At my age! Well, I'll give them exactly ten minutes."

"Me up first!" shouted Ronnie, swinging the bat in a wide wobbly arc. "Here's old Tony Perez comin' to the plate!"

"Hold on a minute, sport," said Owen. "Let's have ladies first. Show your Grandma how to hold the bat."

"Aw, okay. Here, Grandma. Put your one hand here and your other hand here, and stand like this, and hit the ball. That right, Grandpa?"

"It'll do for starts," said Owen. "Now I'll pitch and, Ronnie, you be catcher."

"Okay. Here's old Johnny Bench behind the plate." Ronnie turned his red cap backwards and squatted down behind the flat stone Owen had placed to mark the position of home plate.

Stella felt awkward and ridiculous with her plump hands wrapped around the unwieldy bat, her feet apart and her rump pointing northeast.

"Now, Stella," said Owen, "I'll pitch 'em slow and easy. Don't

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worry if you don't hit anything. But just in case you do, that's first base over there. A home run is anything that goes beyond the driveway on that side and the rhododendron hedge over there. If you do happen to hit the ball, maybe you should let Ronnie run for you. Ready? Batter up!"

"I'll do my own running, Owen Crump," muttered Stella. The contrast between her undignified position of the moment and the sweet flattery that had poured into her ear an hour ago caused Stella's cheeks to burn with indignation. Francis X. Lafferty had sipped his tea and told her, "You are one of the rare ones, dear lady. But I fear your true worth is known only to a few. Your husband is a lucky man. How I would like to . . . but, no, let that remain unsaid." And *now* look at her, standing out here like a dummy with a baseball bat in her hands, about to make a fool of herself.

Owen went through an elaborate windup and Stella watched his gyrations through narrowed eyes. The ball left his hand and she swung as she had seen so many batters swing, slicing the air hard and clean. The loud crack was a shock to her. The impact shivered her arm clear to the shoulder and set her glasses jiggling. Too surprised to run, she stood and watched the ball fly straight and true, watched amazement take possession of Owen's face in the split second before the ball, with all the force of Stella's yearning behind it, hit him squarely between the eyes. Stella heard a soft, sickening thud.

"Oof," said Owen, and fell over backwards.

"Oh, my goodness," said Stella. "Are you all right?"

"Get up, Grandpa," said Ronnie. "I didn't get my turn yet."

But Owen Crump did not get up. He lay in the grass behind his improvised pitcher's mound, his eyes wide to the cloudless summer sky. Stella's eyes were wide too, with suddenly unlimited possibilities.

"I think you'd better go indoors, Ronnie," said Stella Crump.

Stella felt she looked well in black. It lent her an air of sorrowful mystery and had a slimming effect as well. A merciful release, she thought, the stilted words intended for herself and not for Owen. She hid her jubilation well with sighs and stifled moans and exclamations of "What will I do now?" Stella knew perfectly well what she would do now.

Owen Crump had left his affairs in apple-pie order. His will

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was brief and to the point. So much for his only daughter, a generous allotment for Ronnie and his infant sister, a sizable donation to the Little League, and the rest to his dearly beloved Stella.

The Garden Club rallied 'round the new widow and Stella bravely accepted their gifts of flowers and small cakes. Her daughter, a thoroughly up-to-the-minute girl, telephoned every day to warn of the dangers of allowing herself to feel guilty. "It was an accident, Ma, no matter what anyone says." Ronnie was taken to a child psychiatrist to exorcise any guilt feelings he might have. But neither Stella nor Ronnie was troubled overmuch with mental anguish. Ronnie because he was a healthy young animal and didn't connect himself with the fateful consequence of Grandma's batting average. And Stella was too busy exploring the prospects of her new status to feel anything but excited and optimistic. On the day of the funeral, Stella stuffed the remaining season tickets down the garbage disposal and listened with satisfaction to their slurping, grinding destruction.

And Francis X. Lafferty became a constant visitor.

"Dear lady," he said, "your sorrow is mine to share, your tears fall into the fertile garden of my heart and water the seeds of concern. Let me help you bear this terrible grief."

Stella let him help. She let him drive her around town in Owen's Cadillac, assisting her with those errands that even a newly bereaved widow must perform. She let him escort her to dinner at expensive restaurants featuring secluded tables and rich pastries. He encouraged her to do her share by picking up the tab.

Tongues wagged as tongues would. The Garden Club was quite enjoyably shocked, and for several meetings did not need to engage a speaker. Stella and Francis provided all the topic that was necessary.

Stella's daughter, that thoroughly up-to-the-minute girl, said, "Look, Ma. Personally, I think he's a fraud. But if he's what you need, enjoy yourself. Hang in there and don't let the old biddies get you down. Only if I were you, I'd think twice about getting married again. Got to run now. Ronnie has to see his shrink, and I have a macrame class in half an hour."

Stella did think twice about getting married. In the weeks following Bat Day, she thought of little else. Marriage to Francis and a honeymoon trip around the world, with Francis bringing his message of love and harmony to ever larger and more en-

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thusiastic audiences. Stella could see it all as if it were already happening. Francis, tall and imposing, receiving the adulation of the crowd, while she sat backstage waiting for him to come to her. He would dedicate books to her, and she would be his inspiration. They would travel from London to Paris to Rome. She thought it might be wise to skip over the Middle East, and was none too sure about Francis' reception in India. They seemed to be on the export side of the guru business there. Tokyo, of course. And then a long stay in Honolulu. She pondered the advisability of hiring a press agent.

Francis said, "Dear, dearest Stella. I hesitate to seem importunate. Unseemly haste in these matters can lead to sad regret. Still, it is my fondest wish . . ."

Stella said, "Yes."

". . . my heart's deepest desire, to dare to hope that you will one day in the not too distant future . . ."

Stella said, "Yes."

". . . consent to become my wife. That is, as soon as a suitable period of mourning has passed, and your heart is able once again to receive the outpourings of another."

Stella said, "Yes."

"What did you say, beloved?"

"I said, 'Yes.' How about three weeks from today?"

Stella and Francis got married on the day that the home team batted its way into the World Series. To Stella, if she had taken notice, it might have seemed a fitting irony. But she was too busy with wedding plans and travel brochures. Even a small discreet wedding took a certain degree of planning. Arrangements had to be made for joint bank accounts and joint credit cards, Francis must have a new wardrobe, starting with four dozen silk handkerchiefs. The Lincoln Continental, Stella thought, could wait until they returned from their travels. The old Cadillac would do until they left. Through it all, Francis smiled indulgently and made occasional heartfelt speeches on the subject of contentment.

Despite all of Stella's efforts, she found it was not possible to schedule a lecture tour at short notice. The Royal Albert Hall stubbornly refused to accommodate Francis until the middle of November. So the trip was postponed and Stella and Francis settled in for a short interval of homely marital bliss before their world travels could begin.

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Francis consoled a downcast Stella. "Anywhere on earth with you, dear Stella, is paradise to me. Don't you think we ought to buy a boat? I've always had a yen to play Huck Finn on the river."

"You pick one out, dearest. I've got to keep after these travel agents and the speaker's bureau or we'll never get this trip off the ground."

So intent was Stella on planning each last detail of this fabulous trip around the world, she scarcely noticed that Francis spent more and more time pottering about on his new toy, a 25-foot cabin cruiser. Or that when he was at home, he'd taken to hanging about the rec room in the basement with his feet on the furniture watching television and munching swiss cheese and salami sandwiches.

One day, after a particularly fruitless telephone exchange with a booking agent in Brussels, Stella slammed the receiver down and almost wept with sheer frustration. She was tempted to abandon the lecture part of the trip. But that was the point of the whole thing, after all. The tour was her wedding gift to her husband, and she couldn't just give up this wonderful opportunity for dear Francis to deliver his message to the world and become as well known as Billy Graham, or the Maharishi, at the very least. Still, it would be such a help if he would take just the slightest interest in the practical side of becoming an inspirational figure on an international scale.

Stella pouted and rubbed her tired eyes, thereby multiplying the tiny creases, folds, and pouches that adorned her face. She was too annoyed to care. She heard the powerful hum of the Cadillac's engine in the drive and tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange her face into a semblance of contentment. Dear Francis always seemed to take it as a personal insult if she appeared even slightly discontent.

The front door opened and Francis bounded into the house with an even greater display of youthful enthusiasm than usual.

"I've got them, Stella dearest!" he shouted. "The tickets! I've got them! Oh, you don't know how long I've wanted them. And now, thanks to you, I've finally got them. Now I am truly content."

"Tickets? What tickets? I haven't even gotten our itinerary straightened out yet. How could you get the tickets?"

"No, Stella dearest. You don't understand. I guess I've never really told you how much I've always wanted to have season tickets to the football games. And now I've got them. And we won't have

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to miss a single game. Isn't that wonderful? I think I'll go get myself a beer."

Francis cavorted out into the kitchen. Stella heard the refrigerator door slam, and the old familiar hissing pop of the easy-open beer can. Football! He'd never mentioned football. If anything, football was worse than baseball. All those hulking great bodies charging up and down a muddy field. Sitting in the stands, cold and damp, with her fingers too chilled to knit. And all that noise. Oh, no! How could he do this to her? And what about their trip?

Stella marched determinedly into the kitchen. Francis was sitting at the kitchen table poring over a schedule and sipping from a can.

"What about our trip? And the least you could do is pour that disgusting beer into a glass!"

"Stella, dearest," soothed Francis. "Have I done something to disturb you? You seem suddenly so discontent. You know I can't bear to have you emitting waves of displeasure. It upsets my own balance of contentment, and just when I'm feeling so eternally grateful to you. Please don't spoil it for both of us."

"But what about our trip?" she asked again. "I've just about got things lined up and we could leave next month if all goes well."

"Yes, but don't you think we could postpone it just a little bit longer? After all, we've already been delayed and it would be much more pleasant to travel in the springtime. Don't you think?"

"Oh, I see," said Stella, clamping her jaw shut on all the vicious malcontented words struggling to leap off her tongue. Oh, I could kill him, she raged inwardly. Bean him with his precious football, bop him with a goalpost, punt him over the moon. But none of these measures seemed even remotely feasible.

Stella turned and marched out of the kitchen. Resolutely, she climbed the stairs, muttering to herself.

"Just you wait, Francis X. Lafferty. *Dear* Francis. Just you wait. It's going to be my turn next. I'm going to be the next season ticket holder around here."

She smiled as she remembered her recent prowess with a baseball bat. It could have been beginner's luck, but then again maybe she was just a natural athlete. *She* would get the next set of season tickets, and she would watch the players carefully.

"And then, dearest Francis," she murmured, "we'll just see what a novice can do with a hockey puck."

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a detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

One of the best Agatha Christie nonseries detective stories—that is, about a detective who has appeared only one time in an Agatha Christie story (thus ruling out Hercule Poirot, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, Harley Quin, Miss Jane Marple, and Parker Pyne). In this instance it is Sir Edward Palliser, K.C., a retired criminal lawyer who once—so long ago, it seemed to Sir Edward—made a promise to a beautiful young girl. And when that girl, now grown up, became a damsel in distress, Sir Edward became a knight in shining armor—to go forth and give battle to the Dragon of Murder . . .

SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

Sir Edward Palliser, K.C., lived at No. 9 Queen Anne's Close. Queen Anne's Close is a cul-de-sac. In the very heart of Westminster it manages to have a peaceful old-world atmosphere far removed from the turmoil of the twentieth century. It suited Sir Edward Palliser admirably.

Sir Edward had been one of the most eminent criminal barristers of his day and now that he no longer practiced at the Bar he had amused himself by amassing a very fine criminological library. He was also the author of a volume of Reminiscences of Eminent Criminals.

On this particular evening Sir Edward was sitting in front of his library fire sipping some excellent black coffee, and shaking his head over a volume of Lombroso. Such ingenious theories and so completely out of date.

The door opened almost noiselessly and his well-trained manservant approached over the thick pile carpet, and murmured discreetly, "A young lady wishes to see you, sir."

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"A young lady?"

Sir Edward was surprised. Here was something quite out of the usual course of events. Then he reflected that it might be his niece, Ethel—but no, in that case Armour would have said so.

He inquired cautiously. "The lady did not give her name?"

"No, sir, but she said she was quite sure you would wish to see her."

"Show her in," said Sir Edward Palliser. He felt pleasurably intrigued.

A tall dark girl of close on 30, wearing a black coat and skirt, well cut, and a little black hat, came to Sir Edward with outstretched hand and a look of eager recognition on her face. Armour withdrew, closing the door behind him.

"Sir Edward—you do know me, don't you? I'm Magdalen Vaughan."

"Why, of course." He pressed the outstretched hand warmly.

He remembered her perfectly now. That trip home from America on the *Siluric*. This charming child—for she had been little more than a child. He had made love to her, he remembered, in a discreet, elderly man-of-the-world fashion. She had been so adorably young, so eager, so full of admiration and hero-worship—just made to captivate the heart of a man near 60. The remembrance brought additional warmth into the pressure of his hand.

"This is most delightful of you. Sit down, won't you." He arranged an armchair for her, talking easily and evenly, wondering all the time why she had come. When at last he brought the easy flow of small talk to an end there was a silence.

Her hand closed and unclosed on the arm of the chair as she moistened her lips. Suddenly she spoke—abruptly.

"Sir Edward, I want you to help me."

He was surprised and murmured mechanically, "Yes?"

She went on, speaking more intensely, "You said that if ever I needed help, that if there was anything in the world you could do for me, you would do it."

Yes, he *had* said that. It was the sort of thing one did say—particularly at the moment of parting. He could recall the break in his voice, the way he had raised her hand to his lips.

"If there is ever anything I can do—remember, I mean it . . ."

Yes, one said that sort of thing. . . . But very, very rarely did one have to fulfill one's words! And certainly not after—how

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many?—nine or ten years. He flashed a quick glance at her—she was still a very good-looking girl, but she had lost what had been to him her charm—that look of dewy untouched youth. It was a more interesting face now, perhaps—a younger man might have thought so—but Sir Edward was far from feeling the tide of warmth and emotion that had been his at the end of that Atlantic voyage.

His face became legal and cautious. He said in a rather brisk way, "Certainly, my dear young lady, I shall be delighted to do anything in my power—though I doubt if I can be very helpful to anyone in these days."

If he was preparing his way of retreat she did not notice it. She was of the type that can only see one thing at a time and what she was seeing at this moment was her own need. She took Sir Edward's willingness to help for granted.

"We are in terrible trouble, Sir Edward."

"*We*? You are married?"

"No—I meant my brother and I. Oh, and William and Emily, too, for that matter. But I must explain. I have—I had an aunt—Miss Crabtree. You may have read about her in the papers? It was horrible. She was killed—murdered."

"Ah!" A flash of interest lit up Sir Edward's face. "About a month ago, wasn't it?"

The girl nodded. "Rather less than that—three weeks."

"Yes, I remember. She was hit on the head in her own house. They didn't get the fellow who did it."

Again Magdalen Vaughan nodded. "They didn't get the man—I don't believe they ever will get the man. You see, there mightn't be any man to get."

"What?"

"Yes, it's awful. Nothing's come out about it in the papers. But that's what the police think. They *know* nobody came to the house that night."

"You mean—?"

"That it's one of us four. It *must* be. They don't know which—and *we* don't know which . . . *We don't know.* And we sit there every day looking at each other surreptitiously and wondering. Oh, if only it could have been someone from outside—but I don't see how it can . . ."

Sir Edward stared at her, his interest rising.

"You mean members of the family are under suspicion?"

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"Yes, that's what I mean. The police haven't said so, of course. They've been quite polite and nice. But they've ransacked the house, they've questioned us all, and Martha again and again . . . And because they don't know which, they're holding their hand. I'm so frightened, so horribly frightened."

"My dear child. Come now, surely you are exaggerating."

"I'm not. It's one of us four—it must be."

"Who are the four to whom you refer?"

Magdalen sat up straight and spoke more composedly.

"There's myself and Matthew. Aunt Lily was our great-aunt. She was my grandmother's sister. We've lived with her ever since we were fourteen—we're twins, you know. Then there was William Crabtree. He was her nephew, her brother's child. He lived there, too, with his wife, Emily."

"She supported them?"

"More or less. He has a little money of his own, but he's not strong and has to live at home. He's a quiet, dreamy sort of man. I'm sure it would have been impossible for him to have—oh, it's awful of me to think of it even!"

"I am still very far from understanding the position. Perhaps you would not mind running over the facts—if it does not distress you too much."

"Oh, no, I want to tell you. And it's all quite clear in my mind still—horribly clear. We'd had tea, you understand, and we'd all gone off to do things of our own. I to do some dressmaking, Matthew to type an article—he does a little journalism; William to do his stamps. Emily hadn't been down to tea. She'd taken a headache powder and was lying down. So there we were, all of us, busy and occupied. And when Martha went in to set the table for supper at half-past seven, there Aunt Lily was—dead. Her head—oh, it's horrible—all crushed in."

"The weapon was found, I think?"

"Yes. It was a heavy paperweight that always lay on the table by the door. The police tested it for fingerprints, but there were none. It had been wiped clean."

"And your first surmise?"

"We thought, of course, it was a burglar. There were two or three drawers of the bureau pulled out, as though a thief had been looking for something. Of course we thought it was a burglar! And then the police came and they said she had been dead at least an hour, and asked Martha who had been to the house, and

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Martha said nobody. And all the windows were fastened on the inside, and there seemed no signs of anything having been tampered with. And then they began to ask us questions."

She stopped. Her eyes, frightened and imploring, sought Sir Edward's in search of reassurance.

"For instance, who benefited by your aunt's death?"

"That's simple. We all benefit equally. She left her money to be divided in equal shares among the four of us."

"And what was the value of her estate?"

"The lawyer told us it will come to about eighty thousand pounds after the death duties are paid."

Sir Edward opened his eyes in some slight surprise.

"That is quite a considerable sum. You knew, I suppose, the total of your aunt's fortune?"

Magdalen shook her head.

"No, it came quite as a surprise to us. Aunt Lily was always terribly careful about money. She kept just the one servant and always talked a lot about economy."

Sir Edward nodded thoughtfully. Magdalen leaned forward a little in her chair.

"You will help me—you will?"

Her words came to Sir Edward as a shock just at the moment when he was becoming interested in her story for its own sake.

"My dear young lady, what can I possibly do? If you want good legal advice I can give you the name—"

She interrupted him. "Oh, I don't want that sort of thing. I want you to help me personally, as a friend."

"That's very charming of you, but—"

"I want you to come to our house. I want you to ask questions. I want you to see and judge for yourself."

"But my dear young—"

"Remember, you promised. Anywhere, any time, you said, if I wanted help—"

Her eyes, pleading yet confident, looked into his. He felt ashamed and strangely touched. That terrific sincerity of hers, that absolute belief in an idle promise, ten years old, as a sacred binding thing. How many men had not said those self-same words—a cliché almost!—and how few of them had ever been called on to make good.

He said rather weakly, "I'm sure there are many people who could advise you better than I could."

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"I've got lots of friends—naturally." He was amused by her naive self-assurance. "But, you see, none of them is clever. Not like you. You're used to questioning people. And with all your experience you must *know*."

"Know what?"

"Whether they're innocent or guilty."

He smiled rather grimly to himself. He flattered himself that, on the whole, he usually *had* known! Though, on many occasions, his private opinion had not been that of the jury.

Magdalen pushed back her hat from her forehead with a nervous gesture, looked round the room, and said, "How quiet it is here. Don't you sometimes long for some noise?"

The cul-de-sac! All unwittingly her words, spoken at random, touched him on the raw. A cul-de-sac. Yes, but there was always a way out—the way you had come—the way back into the world.

Something impetuous and youthful stirred in him. Her simple trust appealed to the best side of his nature—and her problem appealed to something else, the innate criminologist in him. He wanted to see these people of whom she spoke. He wanted to form his own judgment.

He said, "If you are really convinced I can be of any use . . . Mind, I guarantee nothing."

He expected her to be overwhelmed with delight, but she took it very calmly.

"I knew you would do it. I've always thought of you as a real friend. Will you come back with me now?"

"No. I think if I pay you a visit tomorrow it will be more satisfactory. Will you give me the name and address of Miss Crabtree's lawyer? I may want to ask him a few questions."

She wrote it down and handed it to him. Then she got up and said rather shyly, "I—I'm really most awfully grateful. Goodbye."

"And your own address?"

"How stupid of me. 18 Palatine Walk, Chelsea."

It was three o'clock on the following afternoon when Sir Edward Palliser approached 18 Palatine Walk with a sober, measured tread. In the interval he had found out several things. He had paid a visit that morning to Scotland Yard, where the Assistant Commissioner was an old friend of his, and he had also had an interview with the late Miss Crabtree's lawyer. As a result he had a clearer vision of the circumstances.

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Miss Crabtree's arrangements in regard to money had been somewhat peculiar. She never made use of a check book. Instead, she was in the habit of writing to her lawyer and asking him to have a certain sum in five-pound notes waiting for her. It was nearly always the same sum—£300 had been spent—or almost spent. But this was exactly the point that had not been easy to ascertain.

By checking the household expenditure, it was soon evident that Miss Crabtree's expenditure per quarter fell a good deal short of the £300. On the other hand, she was in the habit of sending five-pound notes to needy friends or relatives. Whether there had been much or little money in the house at the time of her death was a debatable point. None had been found.

It was this particular point which Sir Edward was revolving in his mind as he approached Palatine Walk.

The door of the house—which was a non-basement one—was opened to him by a small elderly woman with an alert gaze. He was shown into a big double room on the left of the small hallway and there Magdalen came to him. More clearly than before, he saw the traces of nervous strain on her face.

"You told me to ask questions, and I have come to do so," said Sir Edward, smiling as he shook hands. "First of all, I want to know who last saw your aunt and exactly what time that was."

"It was after tea—five o'clock. Martha was the last person with her. She had been paying the books that afternoon, and brought Aunt Lily the change and the accounts."

"You trust Martha?"

"Oh, absolutely. She was with Aunt Lily for—oh, thirty years, I suppose. She's honest as the day."

Sir Edward nodded.

"Another question. Why did your cousin, Mrs. Crabtree, take a headache powder?"

"Well, because she had a headache."

"Naturally, but was there any particular reason why she *should* have a headache?"

"Well, yes, in a way. There was rather a scene at lunch. Emily is very excitable and highly strung. She and Aunt Lily used to have rows sometimes."

"And they had one at lunch?"

"Yes. Aunt Lily was rather trying about little things. It all started out of nothing, and then they were at it hammer and

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tongs, with Emily saying all sorts of things she couldn't possibly have meant—that she'd leave the house and never come back, that she was grudged every mouthful she ate—oh, all sorts of silly things. And Aunt Lily said the sooner she and her husband packed their bags and went the better. But it all meant nothing, really."

"Because Mr. and Mrs. Crabtree couldn't afford to pack up and go?"

"Oh, not only that. William was fond of Aunt Lily. He really was."

"It wasn't a day of quarrels, by any chance?"

Magdalen's color heightened.

"You mean me? The fuss about my wanting to be a model?"

"Your aunt wouldn't agree?"

"No."

"Why did you want to be a model, Miss Magdalen? Does the life strike you as a very attractive one?"

"No, but anything would be better than going on living here."

"Yes, but now you will have a comfortable income, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, it's quite different *now*."

She made the admission with the utmost simplicity.

He smiled but pursued the subject no further. Instead he said, "And your brother? Did he have a quarrel too?"

"Matthew? Oh, no."

"Then no one can say he had a motive for wishing his aunt out of the way?"

He was quick to seize on the momentary dismay that showed in her face.

"I forgot," he said casually. "He owed a good deal of money, didn't he?"

"Yes; poor old Matthew."

"Still, that will be all right now."

"Yes—" She sighed. "It *is* a relief."

And still she saw nothing! He changed the subject hastily.

"Your cousins and your brother are at home?"

"Yes, I told them you were coming. They are all so anxious to help. Oh, Sir Edward—I feel, somehow, that you are going to find out that everything is all right, that none of us had anything to do with it—that, after all, it *was* an outsider."

"I can't do miracles. I may be able to find out the truth, but I can't make the truth be what you want it to be."

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"Can't you? I feel that you could do anything—anything."

She left the room. He thought, disturbed, "What did she mean by that? Does she want me to suggest a line of defense? For whom?"

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a man about 50 years of age. He had a naturally powerful frame, but stooped slightly. His clothes were untidy and his hair carelessly brushed. He looked good-natured but vague.

"Sir Edward Palliser? Oh, how do you do? Magdalen sent me along. It's very good of you, I'm sure, to wish to help us. Though I don't think anything will ever be really discovered. I mean, they won't catch the fellow."

"You think it was a burglar, then—someone from outside?"

"Well, it must have been. It couldn't be one of the family. These fellows are very clever nowadays—they climb like cats and they get in and out as they like."

"Where were you, Mr. Crabtree, when the tragedy occurred?"

"I was busy with my stamps—in my little sitting room upstairs."

"You didn't hear anything?"

"No, but then I never do hear anything when I'm absorbed. Very foolish of me, but there it is."

"Is the sitting room you refer to over this room?"

"No, it's at the back."

Again the door opened. A small fair woman entered. Her hands were twitching nervously. She looked fretful and excited.

"William, why didn't you wait for me? I said 'wait.' "

"Sorry, my dear, I forgot. Sir Edward Palliser—my wife."

"How do you do, Mrs. Crabtree? I hope you don't mind my coming here to ask a few questions. I know how anxious you must all be to have things cleared up."

"Naturally. But I can't tell you anything—can I, William? I was asleep—in my bed—I only woke up when Martha screamed."

Her hands continued to twitch.

"Where is your room, Mrs. Crabtree?"

"It's over this. But I didn't hear anything—how could I? I was asleep."

He could get nothing out of her but that. She knew nothing—she had heard nothing—she had been asleep. She reiterated it with the obstinacy of a frightened woman. Yet Sir Edward knew very well that it might easily be, probably was, the bare truth.

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He excused himself at last—said he would like to put a few questions to Martha. William Crabtree volunteered to take him to the kitchen. In the hall Sir Edward nearly collided with a tall dark young man who was striding toward the front door.

"Mr. Matthew Vaughan?"

"Yes, but look here, I can't wait. I've got an appointment."

"Matthew!" It was his sister's voice from the stairs. "Oh, Matthew, you promised—"

"I know, sis. But I can't. Got to meet a fellow. And, anyway, what's the good of talking about the damned thing over and over again. We have enough of that with the police. I'm fed up with the whole show."

The front door banged. Mr. Matthew Vaughan had made his exit.

Sir Edward was introduced into the kitchen. Martha was ironing. She paused, iron in hand. Sir Edward shut the door behind him.

"Miss Vaughan has asked me to help her," he said. "I hope you won't object to my asking you a few questions."

She looked at him, then shook her head.

"None of them did it, sir. I know what you're thinking, but it isn't so. As nice a set of ladies and gentlemen as you could wish to see."

"I've no doubt of it. But their niceness isn't what we call evidence, you know."

"Perhaps not, sir. The law's a funny thing. But there is evidence—as you call it, sir. None of them could have done it without *my* knowing."

"But surely—"

"I know what I'm talking about, sir. There, listen to that."

"That" was a creaking sound above their heads.

"The stairs, sir. Every time anyone goes up or down, the stairs creak something awful. It doesn't matter how quiet you go. Mrs. Crabtree, she was lying on her bed, and Mr. Crabtree was fiddling about with them wretched stamps of his, and Miss Magdalen, she was up above working her sewing machine, and if any one of those three had come down the stairs I should have known it. And they didn't!"

She spoke with a positive assurance which impressed the barrister. He thought: "A good witness. She'd carry weight."

"You mightn't have noticed."

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"Yes, I would. I'd have noticed without noticing, so to speak. Like you notice when a door shuts and somebody goes out."

Sir Edward shifted his ground.

"That is three of them accounted for, but there is a fourth. Was Mr. Matthew Vaughan upstairs also?"

"No, but he was in the little room downstairs. Next door. And he was typewriting. You can hear it plain in here. His machine never stopped for a moment. Not for a moment, sir. I can swear to it. A nasty, irritating tap-tapping noise it is too."

Sir Edward paused a few moments.

"It was you who found her, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it was. Lying there with blood on her poor hair. And no one hearing a sound on account of the tap-tapping of Mr. Matthew's typewriter."

"I understand you are positive that no one came to the house?"

"How could they, sir, without my knowing? The bell rings in here. And there's only the one door."

He looked at her straight in the face. "You were attached to Miss Crabtree?"

A warm glow—genuine, unmistakable—came into her face.

"Yes, indeed, I was, sir. But for Miss Crabtree—well, I'm getting on and I don't mind speaking of it now. I got into trouble, sir, when I was a girl, and Miss Crabtree stood by me—took me back into her service, she did, when it was all over. I'd have died for her—I would indeed."

Sir Edward knew sincerity when he heard it, and Martha was sincere.

"As far as you know, no one came to the door?"

"No one could have come."

"I said as far as *you* know. But if Miss Crabtree had been expecting someone, if she opened the door to that someone herself?"

"Oh!"

"That's possible, I suppose?" Sir Edward urged.

"It's possible—yes—but it isn't very likely. I mean—"

She was clearly taken aback. She couldn't deny and yet she wanted to do so. Why? Because she knew that the truth lay elsewhere. Was that it? The four people in the house—one of them guilty?

Did Martha want to shield that guilty party? *Had* the stairs creaked? Had someone come stealthily down and did Martha know who that someone was?

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She herself was honest—Sir Edward was convinced of that.

He pressed his point, watching her. "Miss Crabtree might have done that, I suppose? The window of that room faces the street. She might have seen whoever it was she was waiting for from the window and gone out into the hall and let him—or her—in. She might even have wished that no one should see the person."

Martha looked troubled. She said at last, reluctantly, "Yes, you may be right, sir. I never thought of that. That she was expecting a gentleman—yes, it well might be."

It was as though she began to perceive advantages in the idea.

"You were the last person to see her, were you not?"

"Yes, sir. After I'd cleared away the tea. I took the receipted books to her and the change from the money she'd given me."

"Had she given the money to you in five-pound notes?"

"A five-pound note, sir," said Martha in a shocked voice. "The books never came up as high as five pounds. I'm very careful."

"Where did she keep her money?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. I should say that she carried it about with her—in her black velvet bag. But of course she may have kept it in one of the drawers in her bedroom that were locked. She was very fond of locking up things, though prone to lose her keys."

Sir Edward nodded. "You don't know how much money she had—in five-pound notes, I mean?"

"No, sir, I couldn't say what the exact amount was."

"And she said nothing to you that could lead you to believe she was expecting anybody?"

"No, sir."

"You're quite sure? What exactly did she say?"

"Well," Martha considered, "she said the butcher was nothing more than a rogue and a cheat, and she said I'd had in a quarter of a pound of tea more than I ought, and she said Mrs. Crabtree was full of nonsense for not liking to eat margarine, and she didn't like one of the sixpences I'd brought back—one of the new ones with oak leaves on it—she said it was bad, and I had a lot of trouble to convince her. And she said—oh, that the fishmonger had sent haddocks instead of whitings, and had I told him about it, and I said I had—and, really, I think that's all, sir."

Martha's speech had made the deceased lady loom clear to Sir Edward as a detailed description would never have done. He said casually, "Rather a difficult mistress to please, eh?"

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"A bit fussy, but there, poor dear, she didn't often get out, and staying cooped up she had to have something to amuse herself like. She was pernickety but kind-hearted—never a beggar sent away from the door without something. Fussy she may have been, but a real charitable lady."

"I am glad, Martha, that she leaves one person to regret her."

The old servant caught her breath.

"You mean—oh, but they were all fond of her—really—underneath. They all had words with her now and again, but it didn't mean anything."

Sir Edward lifted his head. There was a creak above.

"That's Miss Magdalen coming down."

"How do you know?" he shot at her.

The old woman flushed. "I know her step," she explained.

Sir Edward left the kitchen rapidly. Martha had been right. Magdalen had just reached the bottom stair. She looked at him hopefully.

"Not very far as yet," said Sir Edward, answering her look, and added, "You don't happen to know what letters your aunt received on the day of her death?"

"They are all together. The police have been through them, of course."

She led the way to the big living room, and unlocking a drawer, took out a large black velvet bag with an old-fashioned silver clasp.

"This is aunt's bag. Everything is in here just as it was on the day of her death. I've kept it like that."

Sir Edward thanked her and proceeded to turn out the contents of the bag on the table. It was, he fancied, a fair specimen of an eccentric elderly lady's handbag.

There was some old silver change, two ginger nuts, three newspaper clippings, a trashy, printed poem about the unemployed, an *Old Moore's Almanack,* a large piece of camphor, some spectacles, and three letters. A spidery one from someone called "Cousin Lucy," a bill for repairing a watch, and an appeal from a charitable institution.

Sir Edward went through everything very carefully, then repacked the bag and handed it to Magdalen with a sigh.

"Thank you, Miss Magdalen. I'm afraid there isn't much there."

He rose, observed that the window commanded a good view of the front-door steps, then took Magdalen's hand in his.

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"You are going?"

"Yes."

"But it's—it's going to be all right?"

"Nobody connected with the law ever commits himself to a rash statement like that," said Sir Edward solemnly, and made his escape.

He walked along the street, lost in thought. The puzzle was there under his hand—and he had not solved it. It needed something—some little thing. Just to point the way.

A hand fell on his shoulder and he started. It was Matthew Vaughan, somewhat out of breath.

"I've been chasing you. Sir Edward. I want to apologize. For my rotten manners half an hour ago. But I've not got the best temper in the world, I'm afraid. It's awfully good of you to bother about this business. Please ask me whatever you like. If there's anything I can do to help—"

Suddenly Sir Edward stiffened. His glance was fixed—not on Matthew, but across the street. Somewhat bewildered, Matthew repeated, "If there's anything I can do to help—"

"You have already done it, my dear young man," said Sir Edward. "By stopping me at this particular spot and so fixing my attention on something I might otherwise have missed."

He pointed across the street to a small restaurant opposite.

"The Four and Twenty Blackbirds?" asked Matthew in a puzzled voice.

"Exactly."

"It's an odd name, but you get quite decent food there, I believe."

"I shall not take the risk of experimenting," said Sir Edward. "Being further from my nursery days than you are, my young friend, I probably remember my nursery rhymes better. There is a classic version that runs thus, if I remember rightly: *Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye, Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie*—and so on. The rest of it does not concern us."

He wheeled round sharply.

"Where are you going?" asked Matthew Vaughan.

"Back to your house."

They walked there in silence, Matthew Vaughan shooting puzzled glances at his companion. Sir Edward entered, strode to a drawer, lifted out a velvet bag, and opened it. He looked at Matthew and the young man reluctantly left the room.

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Sir Edward tumbled out the silver change on the table. Then he nodded. His memory had not been at fault.

He got up and rang the bell, slipping something into the palm of his hand as he did so.

Martha answered the bell.

"You told me, Martha, if I remember rightly, that you had a slight altercation with your late mistress over one of the new sixpences."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, but the curious thing is, Martha, that among this loose change, *there is no new sixpence*. There are two sixpences, but they are both old ones."

She stared at him in a puzzled fashion.

"You see what that means? *Someone did come to the house that evening—someone to whom your mistress gave sixpence* . . . I think she gave it to him in exchange for this—"

With a swift movement he shot his hand forward, holding out the doggerel verse about unemployment.

One glance at her face was enough.

"The game is up, Martha—you see, I know. You may as well tell me everything."

She sank down on a chair and tears raced down her face.

"It's true—it's true—the bell didn't ring properly—I wasn't sure, and then I thought I'd better go and see. I got to the door just as he struck her down. The roll of five-pound notes was on the table in front of her—it was the sight of them as made him do it—that and thinking she was alone in the house as she'd let him in. I couldn't scream. I was too paralyzed and then he turned—and I saw it was my boy . . .

"Oh, he's been a bad one always. I gave him all the money I could. He's been in jail twice. He must have come around to see me, and then Miss Crabtree, seeing as I didn't answer the door, went to answer it herself, and he was taken aback and pulled out one of those unemployment leaflets, and the mistress being always kind and charitable, told him to come in, and got out a sixpence.

"And all the time that roll of notes was lying on the table where it had been when I was giving her the change. And the devil got into my Ben and he got behind her and struck her down."

"And then?" asked Sir Edward.

"Oh, sir, what could I do? My own flesh and blood. His father

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was a bad one, and Ben takes after him—but he was my own son. I hustled him out, and I went back to the kitchen, and I went to set the table for supper at the usual time. Do you think it was very wicked of me, sir? I tried to tell you no lies when you was asking me questions."

Sir Edward rose.

"My poor woman," he said with feeling in his voice. "I am very sorry for you. All the same, the law will have to take its course, you know."

"He's fled the country, sir. I don't know where he is."

"There's a chance, then, that he may escape the gallows, but don't count on it. Will you send Miss Magdalen to me?"

"Oh, Sir Edward. How wonderful of you—how wonderful you are," said Magdalen when he had finished his brief recital. "You've saved us all. How can I ever thank you?"

Sir Edward smiled down at her and patted her hand gently. He was very much the great man. Little Magdalen had been very charming on the *Siluric*. That bloom of seventeen—wonderful! She had completely lost it now, of course.

"Next time you need a friend—" he said.

"I'll come straight to you."

"No, no," cried Sir Edward in alarm. "That's just what I don't want you to do. Go to a younger man."

He extricated himself with dexterity from the grateful household and hailing a taxi sank into it with a sigh of relief. Even the charm of a dewy seventeen seemed doubtful.

It could not really compare with a well-stocked library on criminology.

The taxi turned into Queen Anne's Close.

His cul-de-sac.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BLOCH

It all started outside an especially curious curiosity shop in London's Saxe-Coburg Square . . . and ended in a shabby lodging at 17 Dorcas Lane, the two friends drawn there by a famous mystery and themselves becoming part of the terrible legend . . .

A MOST UNUSUAL MURDER

by ROBERT BLOCH

Only the dead know Brooklyn.

Thomas Wolfe said that, and he's dead now, so he ought to know.

London, of course, is a different story.

At least that's the way Hilary Kane thought of it. Not as a story, perhaps, but rather as an old-fashioned, outsize picaresque novel in which every street was a chapter crammed with characters and incidents of its own. Each block a page, each structure a separate paragraph unto itself within the sprawling, tangled plot—such was Hilary Kane's concept of the city, and he knew it well.

Over the years he strolled the pavements, reading the city sentence by sentence until every line was familiar; he'd learned London by heart.

And that's why he was so startled when, one bleak afternoon late in November, he discovered the shop in Saxe-Coburg Square.

"I'll be damned!" he said.

"Probably." Lester Woods, his companion, took the edge off the affirmation with an indulgent smile. "What's the problem?"

"This." Kane gestured towards the tiny window of the establishment nestled inconspicuously between two residential relics of Victoria's day.

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"An antique place." Woods nodded. "At the rate they're springing up there must be at least one for every tourist in London."

"But not here." Kane frowned. "I happen to have come by this way less than a week ago, and I'd swear there was no shop in the Square."

"Then it must have opened since." The two men moved up to the entrance, glancing through the display window in passing.

Kane's frown deepened. "You call this new? Look at the dust on those goblets."

"Playing detective again, eh?" Woods shook his head. "Trouble with you, Hilary, is that you have too many hobbies." He glanced across the Square as a chill wind heralded the coming of twilight. "Getting late—we'd better move along."

"Not until I find out about this."

Kane was already opening the door and Woods sighed. "The game is afoot, I suppose. All right, let's get it over with."

The shop-bell tinkled and the two men stepped inside. The door closed, the tinkling stopped, and they stood in the shadows and the silence.

But one of the shadows was not silent. It rose from behind the single counter in the small space before the rear wall.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said the shadow. And switched on an overhead light. It cast a dim nimbus over the countertop and gave dimension to the shadow, revealing the substance of a diminutive figure with an unremarkable face beneath a balding brow.

Kane addressed the proprietor. "Mind if we have a look?"

"Is there any special area of interest?" The proprietor gestured toward the shelves lining the wall behind him. "Books, maps, china, crystal?"

"Not really," Kane said. "It's just that I'm always curious about a new shop of this sort—"

The proprietor shook his head. "Begging your pardon, but it's hardly new."

Woods glanced at his friend with a barely suppressed smile, but Kane ignored him.

"Odd," Kane said. "I've never noticed this place before."

"Quite so. I've been in business a good many years, but this *is* a new location."

Now it was Kane's turn to glance quickly at Woods, and his smile was not suppressed. But Woods was already eyeing the ar-

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tifacts on display, and after a moment Kane began his own inspection.

Peering at the shelving beneath the glass counter, he made a rapid inventory. He noted a boudoir lamp with a beaded fringe, a lavaliere, a tray of pearly buttons, a durbar souvenir programme, and a framed and inscribed photograph of Matilda Alice Victoria Wood *aka* Bella Delmare *aka* Marie Lloyd. There was a miscellany of old jewelry, hunting-watches, pewter mugs, napkin rings, a toy bank in the shape of a miniature Crystal Palace, and a display poster of a formidably mustached Lord Kitchener with his gloved finger extended in a gesture of imperious command.

It was, he decided, the mixture as before. Nothing unusual, and most of it—like the Kitchener poster—not even properly antique but merely outmoded. Those fans on the bottom shelf, for example, and the silk toppers, the opera glasses, the black bag in the far corner covered with what was once called "American cloth."

Something about the phrase caused Kane to stoop and make a closer inspection. *American cloth*. Dusty now, but once shiny, like the tarnished silver nameplate identifying its owner. He read the inscription.

J. Ridley, M.D.

Kane looked up, striving to conceal his sudden surge of excitement.

Impossible! It couldn't be—and yet it was. Keeping his voice and gesture carefully casual, he indicated the bag to the proprietor.

"A medical kit?"

"Yes, I imagine so."

"Might I ask where you acquired it?"

The little man shrugged. "Hard to remember. In this line one picks up the odd item here and there over the years."

"Might I have a look at it, please?"

The elderly proprietor lifted the bag to the countertop. Woods stared at it, puzzled, but Kane ignored him, his gaze intent on the nameplate below the lock. "Would you mind opening it?" he said.

"I'm afraid I don't have a key."

Kane reached out and pressed the lock; it was rusted, but firmly fixed. Frowning, he lifted the bag and shook it gently.

Something jiggled inside, and as he heard the click of metal against metal his elation peaked. Somehow he suppressed it as he spoke.

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"How much are you asking?"

The proprietor was equally emotionless. "Not for sale."

"But—"

"Sorry, sir. It's against my policy to dispose of blind items. And since there's no telling what's inside—"

"Look, it's only an old medical bag. I hardly imagine it contains the Crown jewels."

In the background Woods snickered, but the proprietor ignored him. "Granted," he said. "But one can't be certain of the contents." Now the little man lifted the bag and once again there was a clicking sound. "Coins, perhaps."

"Probably just surgical instruments," Kane said impatiently. "Why don't you force the lock and settle the matter?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that. It would destroy its value."

"What value?" Kane's guard was down now; he knew he'd made a tactical error but he couldn't help himself.

The proprietor smiled. "I told you the bag is not for sale."

"Everything has its price."

Kane's statement was a challenge, and the proprietor's smile broadened as he met it. "One hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds for *that?*" Woods grinned—then gaped at Kane's response.

"Done and done."

"But, sir—"

For answer Kane drew out his wallet and extracted five twenty-pound notes. Placing them on the countertop, he lifted the bag and moved toward the door. Woods followed hastily, turning to close the door behind him.

The proprietor gestured. "Wait—come back—"

But Kane was already hurrying down the street, clutching the black bag under his arm.

He was still clutching it half an hour later as Woods moved with him into the spacious study of Kane's flat overlooking the verdant vista of Cadogan Square. Dappled splotches of sunlight reflected from the gleaming oilcloth as Kane set the bag on the table and carefully wiped away the film of dust with a dampened rag. He smiled triumphantly at Woods.

"Looks a bit better now, don't you think?"

"I don't think anything." Woods shook his head. "A hundred pounds for an old medical kit—"

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"A *very* old medical kit," said Kane. "Dates back to the Eighties, if I'm not mistaken."

"Even so, I hardly see —"

"Of course you wouldn't! I doubt if anyone besides myself would attach much significance to the name of J. Ridley, M.D."

"Never heard of him."

"That's understandable." Kane smiled. "He preferred to call himself Jack the Ripper."

"Jack the Ripper?"

"Surely you know the case. Whitechapel, 1888—the savage slaying and mutilation of prostitutes by a cunning mass-murderer who taunted the police—a shadow, stalking his prey in the streets."

Woods frowned. "But he was never caught, was he? Not even identified."

"In that you're mistaken. No murderer has been identified quite as frequently as Red Jack. At the time of the crimes and over the years since, a score of suspects were named. A prime candidate was the Pole, Klosowski, alias George Chapman, who killed several wives—but poison was his method and gain his motive whereas the Ripper's victims were all penniless prostitutes who died under the knife. Another convicted murderer, Neil Cream, even openly proclaimed he was the Ripper—"

"Wouldn't that be the answer, then?"

Kane shrugged. "Unfortunately, Cream happened to be in America at the time of the Ripper murders. Egomania prompted his false confession." He shook his head. "Then there was John Pizer, a bookbinder known by the nickname of 'Leather Apron'—he was actually arrested, but quickly cleared and released. Some think the killings were the work of a Russian called Konovalov who also went by the name of Pedachenko and worked as a barber's surgeon; supposedly he was a Tsarist secret agent who perpetrated the slayings to discredit the British police."

"Sounds pretty far-fetched if you ask me."

"Exactly." Kane smiled. "But there are other candidates, equally improbable. Montague John Druitt for one, a barrister of unsound mind who drowned himself in the Thames shortly after the last Ripper murder. Unfortunately, it has been established that he was living in Bournemouth, and on the days before and after the final slaying he was there, playing cricket. Then there was the Duke of Clarence—"

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"Who?"

"Queen Victoria's grandson in direct line of succession to the throne."

"Surely you're not serious?"

"No, but others are. It has been asserted that Clarence was a known deviate who suffered from insanity as the result of venereal infection, and that his death in 1892 was actually due to the ravages of his disease."

"But that doesn't prove him to be the Ripper."

"Quite so. It hardly seems possible that he could write the letters filled with American slang and crude errors in grammar and spelling which the Ripper sent to the authorities; letters containing information which could be known only by the murderer and the police. More to the point, Clarence was in Scotland at the time of one of the killings and at Sandringham when others took place. And there are equally firm reasons for exonerating suggested suspects close to him—his friend James Stephen and his physician, Sir William Gull."

"You've really studied up on this," Woods murmured. "I'd no idea you were so keen on it."

"And for good reason. I wasn't about to make a fool of myself by advancing an untenable notion. I don't believe the Ripper was a seaman, as some surmise, for there's not a scintilla of evidence to back the theory. Nor do I think the Ripper was a slaughterhouse worker, a midwife, a man disguised as a woman, or a London bobby. And I doubt the very existence of a mysterious physician named Dr. Stanley, out to avenge himself against the woman who had infected him, or his son."

"But there do seem to be a great number of medical men amongst the suspects," Woods said.

"Right you are, and for good reason. Consider the nature of the crimes—the swift and skillful removal of vital organs, accomplished in the darkness of the streets under constant danger of imminent discovery. All this implies the discipline of someone versed in anatomy, someone with the cool nerves of a practising surgeon. Then too there's the matter of escaping detection. The Ripper obviously knew the alleys and byways of the East End so thoroughly that he could slip through police cordons and patrols without discovery. But if seen, who would have a better alibi than a respectable physician, carrying a medical bag on an emergency call late at night?

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"With that in mind, I set about my search, examining the rolls of London Hospital in Whitechapel Road. I went over the names of physicians and surgeons listed in the Medical Registry for that period."

"All of them?"

"It wasn't necessary. I knew what I was looking for—a surgeon who lived and practised in the immediate Whitechapel area. Whenever possible, I followed up with a further investigation of my suspects' histories—researching hospital and clinic affiliations, even hobbies and background activities from medical journals, press reports, and family records. Of course, all this takes a great deal of time and patience. I must have been tilting at this windmill for a good five years before I found my man."

Woods glanced at the nameplate on the bag. "J. Ridley, M.D.?"

"John Ridley. *Jack,* to his friends—if he had any." Kane paused, thoughtful. "But that's just the point. Ridley appears to have had no friends, and no family. An orphan, he received his degree from Edinburgh in 1878, ten years before the date of the murders. He set up private practise here in London, but there is no office address listed. Nor is there any further information to be found concerning him; it's as though he took particular care to suppress every detail of his personal and private life. This, of course, is what roused my suspicions. For an entire decade J. Ridley lived and practised in the East End without a single mention of his name anywhere in print, except for his Registry listing. And after 1888, even *that* disappeared."

"Suppose he died?"

"There's no obituary on record."

Woods shrugged. "Perhaps he moved, emigrated, took sick, abandoned practise?"

"Then why the secrecy? Why conceal his whereabouts? Don't you see—it's the very lack of such ordinary details which leads me to suspect the extraordinary."

"But that's not evidence. There's no proof that your Dr. Ridley was the Ripper."

"That's why this is so important." Kane indicated the bag on the tabletop. "If we knew its history, where it came from—"

As he spoke, Kane reached down and picked up a brass letter-opener from the table, then moved to the bag.

"Wait." Woods put a restraining hand on Kane's shoulder. "That may not be necessary."

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"What do you mean?"

"I think the shopkeeper was lying. He knew what the bag contains—he had to, or else why did he fix such a ridiculous price? He never dreamed you'd take him up on it, of course. But there's no need for you to force the lock any more than there was for him to do so. My guess is that he has a key."

"You're right." Kane set the letter-opener down. "I should have realized, if I'd taken the time to consider his reluctance. He must have the key." He lifted the shiny bag and turned. "Come along—let's get back to him before the shop closes. And this time we won't be put off by any excuses."

Dusk had descended as Kane and his companion hastened through the streets, and darkness was creeping across the deserted silence of Saxe-Coburg Square when they arrived.

They halted then, staring into the shadows, seeking the spot where the shop nestled between the residences looming on either side. The shadows were deeper here and they moved closer, only to stare again at the empty gap between the two buildings.

The shop was gone.

Woods blinked, then turned and gestured to Kane. "But we were here—we saw it—"

Kane didn't reply. He was staring at the dusty, rubble-strewn surface of the space between the structures; at the weeds which sprouted from the bare ground beneath. A chill night wind echoed through the emptiness. Kane stooped and sifted a pinch of dust between his fingers. The dust was cold, like the wind that whirled the fine grains from his hand and blew them away into the darkness.

"What happened?" Woods was murmuring. "Could we both have dreamed—"

Kane stood erect, facing his friend. "This isn't a dream," he said, gripping the black bag.

"Then what's the answer?"

"I don't know." Kane frowned thoughtfully. "But there's only one place where we can possibly find it."

"Where?"

"The 1888 Medical Registry lists the address of John Ridley as Number 17 Dorcas Lane."

The cab which brought them to Dorcas Lane could not enter its

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narrow accessway. The dim alley beyond was silent and empty, but Kane plunged into it without hesitation, moving along the dark passage between solid rows of grimy brick. Treading over the cobblestones, it seemed to Woods that he was being led into another era, yet Kane's progress was swift and unfaltering.

"You've been here before?" Woods said.

"Of course." Kane halted before the unlighted entrance to Number 17, then knocked.

The door opened—not fully, but just enough to permit the figure behind it to peer out at them. Both glance and greeting were guarded.

"Whatcher want?"

Kane stepped into the fan of light from the partial opening. "Good evening. Remember me?"

"Yes." The door opened wider and Woods could see the squat shadow of the middle-aged woman who nodded up at his companion. "Yer the one what rented the back vacancy last Bank 'oliday, ain'tcher?"

"Right. I was wondering if I might have it again."

"I dunno." The woman glanced at Woods.

"Only for a few hours." Kane reached for his wallet. "My friend and I have a business matter to discuss."

"Business, eh?" Woods felt the unflattering appraisal of the landlady's beady eyes. "Cost you a fiver."

"Here you are."

A hand extended to grasp the note. Then the door opened fully, revealing the dingy hall and the stairs beyond.

"Mind the steps now," the landlady said.

The stairs were steep and the woman was puffing as they reached the upper landing. She led them along the creaking corridor to the door at the rear, fumbling for the keys in her apron.

" 'Ere we are."

The door opened on musty darkness, scarcely dispelled by the faint illumination of the overhead fixture as she switched it on. The landlady nodded at Kane. "I don't rent this for lodgings no more—it ain't properly made up."

"Quite all right." Kane smiled, his hand on the door.

"If there's anything you'll be needing, best tell me now. I've got to run over to the neighbor for a bit—she's been took ill."

"I'm sure we'll manage." Kane closed the door, then listened for a moment as the landlady's footsteps receded down the hall.

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"Well," he said. "What do you think?"

Woods surveyed the shabby room with its single window framed by yellowing curtains. He noted the faded carpet with its pattern wellnigh worn away, the marred and chipped surfaces of the massive old bureau and heavy morris-chair, the brass bed covered with a much-mended spread, the ancient gas-log in the fireplace framed by a cracked marble mantelpiece, and the equally-cracked washstand fixture in the corner.

"I think you're out of your mind," Woods said. "Did I understand correctly that you've been here before?"

"Exactly. I came several months ago, as soon as I found the address in the Registry. I wanted a look around."

Woods wrinkled his nose. "More to smell than there is to see."

"Use your imagination, man! Doesn't it mean anything to you that you're standing in the very room once occupied by Jack the Ripper?"

Woods shook his head. "There must be a dozen rooms to let in this old barn. What makes you think this is the right one?"

"The Registry entry specified 'rear'. And there are no rear accommodations downstairs—that's where the kitchen is located. So this has to be the place."

Kane gestured. "Think of it—you may be looking at the very sink where the Ripper washed away the traces of his butchery, the bed in which he slept after his dark deeds were performed! Who knows what sights this room has seen and heard—the voice crying out in a tormented nightmare—"

"Come off it, Hilary!" Woods grimaced impatiently. "It's one thing to use your imagination, but quite another to let your imagination use you."

"Look." Kane pointed to the far corner of the room. "Do you see those indentations in the carpet? I noticed them when I examined this room on my previous visit. What do they suggest to you?"

Woods peered dutifully at the worn surface of the carpet, noting the four round, evenly spaced marks. "Must have been another piece of furniture in that corner. Something heavy, I'd say."

"But what sort of furniture?"

"Well—" Woods considered. "Judging from the space, it wasn't a sofa or chair. Could have been a cabinet, perhaps a large desk—"

"Exactly. A rolltop desk. Every doctor had one in those days." Kane sighed. "I'd give a pretty penny to know what became of that item. It might have held the answer to all our questions."

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"After all these years? Not bloody likely." Woods glanced away. "Didn't find anything else, did you?"

"I'm afraid not. As you say, it's been a long time since the Ripper stayed here."

"I didn't say that." Woods shook his head. "You may be right about the desk. And no doubt the Medical Registry gives a correct address. But all it means is that this room may once have been rented by a Dr. John Ridley. You've already inspected it once—why bother to come back?"

"Because now I have this." Kane placed the black bag on the bed. "And this." He produced a pocket-knife.

"You intend to force the lock after all?"

"In the absence of a key I have no alternative." Kane wedged the blade under the metal guard and began to pry upwards. "It's important that the bag be opened here. Something it contains may very well be associated with this room. If we recognize the connection we might have an additional clue, a conclusive link—"

The lock snapped.

As the bag sprang open, the two men stared down at its contents—the jumble of vials and pillboxes, the clumsy old-style stethescope, the probes and tweezers, the roll of gauze. And, resting atop it, the scalpel with the steel-tipped surface encrusted with brownish stains.

They were still staring as the door opened quietly behind them and the balding, elderly little man entered the room.

"I see my guess was correct, gentlemen. You too have read the Medical Registry." He nodded. "I was hoping I'd find you here."

Kane frowned. "What do you want?"

"I'm afraid I must trouble you for my bag."

"But it's my property now—I bought it."

The little man sighed. "Yes, and I was a fool to permit it. I thought putting on that price would dissuade you. How was I to know you were a collector like myself?"

"Collector?"

"Of curiosa pertaining to murder." The little man smiled. "A pity you cannot see some of the memorabilia I've acquired. Not the commonplace items associated with your so-called Black Museum in Scotland Yard, but true rarities with historical significance." He gestured. "The silver jar in which the notorious French sorceress, La Voisin, kept her poisonous ointments, the actual dirks which dispatched the unfortunate nephews of Richard

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III in the Tower—yes, even the poker responsible for the atrocious demise of Edward II at Berkeley Castle on the night of September 21st, 1327. I had quite a bit of trouble locating it until I realized the date was reckoned according to the old Julian calendar."

Kane frowned impatiently. "Who are you? What happened to that shop of yours?"

"My name would mean nothing to you. As for the shop, let us say that it exists spatially and temporally as I do—when and where necessary for my purposes. By your current and limited understanding, you might call it a sort of time-machine."

Woods shook his head. "You're not making sense."

"Ah, but I am, and very good sense too. How else do you think I could pursue my interests so successfully unless I were free to travel in time? It is my particular pleasure to return to certain eras in this primitive past of yours, visiting the scenes of famous and infamous crimes and locating trophies for my collection.

"The shop, of course, is just something I used as a blind for this particular mission. It's gone now, and I shall be going too, just as soon as I retrieve my property. It happens to be the souvenir of a most unusual murder."

"You see?" Kane nodded at Woods. "I told you this bag belonged to the Ripper!"

"Not so," said the little man. "I already have the Ripper's murder weapon, which I retrieved directly after the slaying of his final victim on November 9th, 1888. And I can assure you that your Dr. Ridley was not Jack the Ripper but merely and simply an eccentric surgeon—" As he spoke, he edged toward the bed.

"No you don't!" Kane turned to intercept him, but he was already reaching for the bag.

"Let go of that!" Kane shouted.

The little man tried to pull away, but Kane's hand swooped down frantically into the open bag and clawed. Then it rose, gripping the scalpel.

The little man yanked the bag away. Clutching it, he retreated as Kane bore down upon him furiously.

"Stop!" Woods cried. Hurling himself forward, he stepped between the two men, directly into the orbit of the descending blade.

There was a gurgle, then a thud, as he fell.

The scalpel clattered to the floor, slipping from Kane's nerveless fingers and coming to rest amidst the crimson stain that seeped and spread.

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The little man stooped and picked up the scalpel. "Thank you," he said softly. "You have given me what I came for." He dropped the weapon into the bag.

Then he shimmered.

Shimmered—and disappeared.

But Woods' body didn't disappear. Kane stared down at it—at the throat ripped open from ear to ear.

He was still staring when they came and took him away.

The trial, of course, was a sensation. It wasn't so much the crazy story Kane told as the fact that nobody could ever find the fatal weapon.

It was a most unusual murder . . .

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■ *NEW* **Chick Kelly story by**

S. S. RAFFERTY

Chick the comic, alias Chick the Dick, falls in love, which with Chick's affinity for crime leads to murder, and if Chick himself isn't up to his neck as a suspect, Chick's chick is . . . Deal 'em, Chick!. . .

KEEP 'EM LAUGHING, CHICK!

by S. S. RAFFERTY

Every time I open this big generous heart of mine, someone moves into it and opens up a Welfare Department. Take Jeepers Jordan, for instance. (If you got a look at Jeepers, you'd take her somewhere for 3,000 years, and keep it a secret.) For two weeks I'm Mr. Terrific, and then she drops the bomb on me.

"You're a big buddy of Billy Tibbs, aren't you, Chick darling? Does he have anything to do with soap operas?" she purrs.

She didn't have to push one more well-formed syllable out of that kitten mouth. I know the bit. Tibbs is a TV network producer, right? And what aspiring young actress wouldn't like to be on a soap? That is not a multiple-choice question, obviously.

Does Chick Kelly fly into a rage? Do I feel wounded? No. El Dopo calls Tibbs and gets her a part on "River of Life." As they say in Brooklyn, I shoulda stood in bed. But once she is on the show, that is precisely what I can't do. Now Jeepers insists that I watch "River of Life" every weekday afternoon at two P.M. I'm an ex-comic who runs his own bistro all night and never gets up until sex or seven, or at least until night life has come to a halt. So, slave of love that I am, I'm conscious in the wee hours of the post meridian, staring at the tube.

I decided to watch the show at the club, because I thought I could get some of the office work done at the same time. That was a mistake, because I had forgotten about Mrs. Mangerton. Nellie

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Mangerton is herself a mistake. She is a widow, a crony of my partner's wife, and what I loosely call my secretary. She comes in for a few hours a day and types up customers' statements and miscellaneous letters, and complains about anything that ever took place after 1910.

Mrs. Mangerton thinks my prices and the cocktail waitresses' skirts are too high and her salary and the lighting too low. Nothing pleases her. I buy her a new electronic calculator and she moans that it doesn't produce a tape for rechecking her figures. I buy her a spanking new electric typewriter, the latest model, and she groans that "you need to be an electronics engineer just to change the ribbon." When I start watching "River of Life," she joins in with the critique. She's appalled by the plots of soap operas. In a way I agree with her.

We watched several segments and I couldn't believe what they get away with on these shows. Murder, bigamy, drug addiction, wife and husband stealing, and I swear every woman has had at least one illegitimate baby. That's some programing, when you consider that most tots are up from their naps or home from nursery school in the afternoon. I figure the network censors sleep all day to be ready with their blue pencils for evening prime-time adult shows. But in comparison to the other soaps on the afternoon roster, "River of Life" was tame.

I settle down after a few weeks and find myself getting hooked on the trials and tribulations of the Martin family. Now Jeepers is a good 24 years old, but with her hair tousled and wearing a baggy sweater she can pass for a teenager. She plays the cousin of young Timmy Martin. She has come to live in Loganburg with the Martins because her own family has been run over by a freight train. Her real family lived in Florida.

I've heard of actors starting to live their roles, but soap-opera people are ridiculous. Jeepers starts walking around my club dressed like she was going to a high-school pep rally and mooning about poor Mums' and Dads' horrible death. I'm afraid the Liquor Commission will lift my license for serving minors.

But in a way I can understand the actor's role-identification. Hell, you play a part every day. Not the same lines, as you would in a play, but an on-going part like life itself. After a while I can see where you'd end up confused as to who you are. But Mrs. Mangerton doesn't waver. She keeps telling me, "Wait and see. The niece will end up pregnant yet."

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By the middle of the third week I've got the secret of writing soaps. Always keep five subplots going at the same time and resolve the major one each Friday, building up the next in line for the following week.

On this particular Friday I know young Timmy Martin is going to beat a marijuana rap that has worried the family for four days. We all know he's got to beat it because he is one of the show's regulars. They can't have the kid in the slammer and still sell soap.

I'm watching the tube at two P.M. and my prediction is turning out fine. Jeepers' part is getting bigger all the time, and I am wondering just how friendly my babycakes is with Billy Tibbs. Such are the problems of show biz.

Suddenly I know something is wrong, because at a point where Jeepers says, "I think that's Timmy now," the camera pans to an empty doorway and just sits there for one long empty minute. Then another camera picks up Pop Martin, who is obviously departing from the script and faking it with ad libs.

I've seen actors throw some very good cover for another cast member who has blown his lines, but this guy is fantastic. Jeepers is doing all right too, and between them they got through to the end of the segment.

I didn't think any more about it, and switched over to a channel where they have cartoons playing. Cartoons have straight truth in them, if you look for it.

Half an hour later I got the phone call. Jeepers was slightly hysterical and under suspicion of murder. Hush, baby. Rush, Kelly.

They shoot the show live in a refurbished theater on upper First Avenue. All I got from Jeepers was that there was a murder, so I guessed it had to be of Timmy Martin. If you ever met a stage brat, you'd know why. I was wrong. It turned out to be the show's writer-producer, Walter Powers.

Getting onto the scene of a crime without a badge can be tougher than getting a bank loan without collateral. The blue boy on the front door looked like an old pro at plowing away snow jobs, so I passed him up and hit the side door on 74th Street. The younger cop stationed there swallowed my story when I flashed my AGVA membership card and did five minutes of baloney schtick, then let me in.

Although I came in from the side of the building, I was actually

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at the back of the operation. Since the show was shot without an audience, the entire floor area was working space, with individual sets parked along the walls. I recognized the Martin living room, the malt shop, Doc Danner's office. Good old Loganburg, U.S.A. I also recognized a burly guy with a shiny domed head talking with a group of people at the far end of the floor. It was Lieutenant Donald (Bullethead) Jaffee of Homicide, who rates me just below Genghis Khan on his Least Favorite People list.

I know if Jaffee or one of his goons spots me, it will be sidewalk time, so I slip around the back of the sets and head for an iron-grill stairway that leads up a brick wall to a balcony with a half dozen doors opening onto it. I've been in enough theaters to know they had to be dressing rooms. Since I didn't see Jeepers in the small crowd around the lieutenant, I was hoping she was hibernating up here.

I opened the first door and found the room empty. So was the second. On the third try I lucked in. Jeepers was sitting at a dressing table talking to a gray-haired lady (Ann Harding-Fay Bainter-Spring Byington-Take Your Pick Stage-Mother Type). She turned out to be Ginny Owens, Old Ma Martin on the show.

Jeepers is really pouring on the emotion, but the Owens dame is giving her a run for the Emmy. I am dividing by seven to find out which part is actress, which part is for real. Between them I finally found out that Walter Powers, the show's writer-producer, had been stabbed to death in his office downstairs, either before or during the afternoon show.

"I thought Billy Tibbs was the producer?" I asked them.

"He's the *executive* producer, Mr. Kelly. Walt did all the work on 'River of Life.' In fact, he owned a piece of the show."

"Make it 'Chick,' Ginny. What happened?"

I let Ginny give me the details because she was making ten percent more sense than her stage niece.

The reason the kid, Timmy Martin (his real name, Tippy Grant), missed his camera cue during the show was because it was he who discovered the body. When he was walking onto the set, he noticed smoke coming from under Powers' office door, and opened it to find the writer slumped over his desk with a letter opener in his back and a fire blazing in the wastepaper basket.

"So what are you getting excited about, Jeep? You were on camera when Powers got it. You and Pop Martin," I said, smiling.

"Cal McKittrick," Ginny told me.

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"Okay, McKittrick. I need a program."

"Not according to that lieutenant." Jeepers is still pouring it on. "You see, Chick, the opening six minutes of the segment was a tape intercut. It was an introspective, double-image shot, and Walt went for tape to make it easier. Everyone was just wandering around the set at the time the police say he was killed."

"So anyone could have done it, says dear old Bullethead Jaffee, huh? You didn't give him a statement, did you?"

"No, he's talking to the rest of the cast downstairs. Will I have to, Chick?"

"From now on you go into pantomime. You're mute. I'd suggest the same to you, Ginny, but be your own guide."

I must remember to close doors behind me—at least I'd have some warning when anybody walks in. In this case I didn't, and Jaffee nailed me.

"Good God Almighty," he roars at my back. "Have you been here all the time, Kelly?"

Well, maybe he didn't nail me. Maybe he dealt me a solid hole card. If by "all this time" he meant before the murder, I had him. If he checked with the cops on the door, he would bounce me out. So I lied, which I do not find difficult, and at times find enjoyable.

"I was visiting Miss Jordan before the show and must have fallen asleep up here. You know, like Goldilocks."

That got him. The hackles went up on his neck. "Get downstairs with the rest of them!" he shouted.

I was hoping he would leave first, because I had eyes for a pay phone on the wall, and a dime ready to call Ted Summers, my lawyer, but I wasn't that lucky. Jaffee herded us out like Lassie.

One of his minions, a guy named Coogan, was taking statements, while another played stenographer, and the rest of his merry men dragged crime-lab paraphernalia in and out. I slumped against a green cinderblock wall near a doorway that was getting a lot of official traffic. I assumed it was Powers', the dead writer's, office, because a smell of wet charred paper reeked out of it. One of the crime-lab boys was saying, "It couldn't have been any more than six or seven pages, Lieutenant. There isn't that much ash. I wish the hell they let it burn out instead of ruining everything with a fire extinguisher."

"It was a natural reaction, Jim. Can you get anything out of that mess?"

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"Snap answer, no, but we'll give it a try, Lieutenant. Might have to send it to the Bureau in D.C."

"Don't, if you can help it. Who needs them? One thing is sure. Whoever gave it to him burned that stuff to cover up. Letters, maybe," Jaffee said.

"Beats me. You getting anything out there with the cast?"

"It's an Ipswich clam bed."

When I heard Jaffee turn, I edged away from the door and mingled with the cast. I spotted Billy Tibbs talking with the woman who plays the Martins' chowderhead neighbor. He introduced her as Mavis Clark. She nodded to me and wandered away.

"How did you get in here, Chick? This would be a good place to stay away from."

I looked him straight in the eye, owing to Jeeper's expanded part. "Because I'm in love."

Billy's no dope. He picked it up. "She's got talent, babe. That's all I care about."

"Sure, Billy."

"Look, Chick, don't complicate matters. I have enough problems. I decided to up the ratings a couple of weeks ago, and the niece role came up. We were going to change a lot of things, but now—well."

"What's with this Walt Powers? Any enemies?"

"I thought you ran a night club?"

"I told you I've got a personal interest. I think I'm going to get tossed out of here if a certain patrolman comes in from the 74th Street door and sees me lined up with the suspects, so give me what you can fast."

Billy Tibbs tilted his head in disbelief. "How do I know, Chick? Lord, a writer is a natural-born enemy of actors. So are producers. Walt happened to be both."

"Yeah, congrats. I hear you're the *executive* producer. I underestimated your clout."

"Clout, hell. I got shoved into this job when I started to lose Nielsen numbers, and it's been going downhill ever since, because Powers wouldn't change the format. You wouldn't believe how old-fashioned that bird was. Our major competitor, 'End of the Rainbow,' had an abortion and a bank robbery in one week, while we had Ma Martin handing out advice on raising children."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Soap watchers want gossip and they want it juicy. Over on 'A

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Second Life' they now have a dope-taking brain surgeon involved in a love triangle that would make D. H. Lawrence blush."

"What was Powers going to change?"

"Damned if I know, Chick. He told me this morning he had the new script worked out, but he didn't show it to me."

"Think that's what the fire was about?"

"You know, I hadn't thought about *that* . . ." Then one of the Homicide goons called his name, and he went over to the center of the floor. Jaffee was really duking it up. He was now sitting at a table with the steno guy next to him, playing Twenty Questions with whoever sat opposite him.

I wanted to get into Powers' office unnoticed, but the lab crew was still working in it, although there were fewer of them now. I decided to haunt the doorway, just in case.

"When do you think I can get in there to clean up?" an old guy in a gray work uniform asks me. "I don't want to be here all night. I got to go clear to Brooklyn."

"The way cops work, Pop, you should be able to get in there in a week or so."

"With that stink of burned paper? Thought you was a dick, s'why I asked."

"Bad casting, Pop. Don't you want a future in show biz?"

"You must be one of them sloppy actors. Messin' up the dressin' rooms, powder on the floor, tissue everywhere. Bunch of pigs."

"No, I'm a friend of Mr. Tibbs." His eyes went up in O's. "Tell me, Pop—"

"Kraft. Sigmund Kraft, studio maintenance."

He said it as if to imply that he was a cut above actors, and if you consider job stability, he was. "Tell me, Sig, you look like you know your way around. You got any ideas on this?"

"Well, if it was that new lady, Miss Jordan, with a knife in her, I'd say it was Tippy Grant or his pain-in-the-neck mother. They sure were mad when the Jordan girl's part was getting bigger all the time."

"You like Miss Jordan?"

He winked at me. "Don't let them baggy clothes of hers fool you, brother. She's full growed."

"Do tell." Everywhere there's competition. "But how about people who might not have liked Powers?"

"All of 'em. Every one of 'em had complaints about their lines or their parts. Fightin' all the time. You see that popinjay over

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there by the stairs?" He pointed to a silver-haired matinee-idol type. "That's Wyler Groves. He's the doctor on the show. Used to be very big years ago on Broadway, and thinks he owns the place. He's the worst with the tissues."

"Yeah, he's the tissue type, Sig."

Sigmund tells me that if he can't clean up the office, he might as well start in the dressing rooms, and I wished him good luck with the powder and theatrical debris and all.

I take another peek into Powers' office, and only one lab man is left. Now I've got to handicap some odds, some long, some short. If the lab man winds up his work, it's 20 to 1 he'll call in Jaffee. It's 10 to 3 Jaffee will put a department seal on the door, and 7 to 5 he'll just get a uniformed bull to play statue in the doorway. If he were just to walk out and leave the room unguarded, you could go 100 to 1 easy. Getting Jaffee was 20 to 1 because Bullethead was still busy playing Torquemada at his table. The hell with the odds, I just walked in.

"Hi," I said to him. He was a young fellow, maybe 25, with mod eyeglasses that made him look like a pilot, or maybe a blowup of a bug.

"You're not allowed in here until the lieutenant clears it."

I turn my eyes in a 180° sweep and go to work with the memory. I can keep him talking for maybe three minutes, so, eyes, do your stuff. I give him a humble act about never having been on the scene of a crime and how exciting his end of the business must be. He isn't biting, but he isn't giving me the heave-ho, either. My best bet to remember the place is to scan the room's perimeter, then its center.

SCAN ONE, full sweep. To left of door is a small table, brown wood. Contains cigarette box, lighter, copy of *Broadcast Magazine.* (Stop. Do not record wall hangings—superfluous.) Left wall has leather couch flanked by two end tables with lamps, far one not lit. End wall has large chart showing segment schedules (too detailed to record). Right wall has bank of six file cabinets.

SCAN TWO, center of room. Two studio chairs in front of green-metal desk. Desk relatively clean. Piles of scripts to the left side of desk, pile of blank pre-carboned paper (the kind Mrs. Mangerton won't use) to the right. Typewriter on roller stand, same model as Mrs. M's. Charred wastebasket next to desk. Doorway wall to right bare. In doorway, irate man with prominent bald head bellowing, "Damn it, what are *you* doing in here?"

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"Just seeing how efficient you fellows can be, Lieutenant." I was going to give him the line about never having been at a murder scene before, but stopped. He would have made it five or six murder scenes, if you counted the girl who was once found dead at my pad.

"Don't think you suckered me with that pitch upstairs, Kelly. You may have buffaloed your way in after we arrived, but that doesn't mean you weren't here earlier, left, then came back. You're in and you're gonna stay in, funny boy."

"Glad to be aboard, Lieutenant. How many times a day do they empty the wastepaper baskets around here?" I didn't ask Sigmund because I might or might not have gotten a straight answer. From Jaffee I was getting no answer. He ignored the question.

"You're here because of that blonde kid, and you know it. Talk about robbing cradles!"

"As we say around here, Lieutenant, she's full growed. You see, it's the deceptiveness of the thespian art form—"

"Shut up and get out there with the rest of them. I ought to lock you up for interfering with an investigation. Did he touch anything at all, Al?"

Al said no with a headshake.

"Aren't you supposed to put up signs saying *Keep Out—Crime Scene*, Lieutenant?"

"You know the sign I'd like to put on you. Did you know Walt Powers?"

"Never met him," I said.

"You know, your girl friend was very chummy with him. Had lunch with him today."

"Along with being full growed, she's friendly and frequently hungry."

"Couldn't have been a little sore about it, could you, Kelly?"

"With my win-loss record, you learn to cry a lot. When the brat discovered the fire, was it blazing or just smoking?"

That did it. Out I went to the mob on the set where Jaffee tells us we can all beat it on our own recognizance, not to leave the city, et cetera. That was a strange move, and I was wondering what he had going.

I grabbed Jeepers and hustled her out the 74th Street door and walked fast toward York Avenue. I didn't quite hear what the young cop on the door said, something like "You wise son-of-a-something." I kept moving down the block and hit it lucky with a

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cab. When we were in, I asked the driver if he liked pictures of Benjamin Franklin, and he said yes, so I told him to gun it down York and then head south.

"What's the hurry, Chick?" my pseudo-Tammy asks.

"I want to jump the tail, Miss Luncheon, U.S.A. Head for the Waldorf, driver, Park Avenue side." I gave Jeepers three C-notes.

"What's this for and why the Waldorf? Are we having an early dinner?"

"No, luv, you just changed your address. It's the Waldorf because it has four exits and I plan to use one. You go to the desk and ask for Ron Dugan, and if he's not there, see Dave Hirsch. They're with Security. Tell him to give you a room, backdated two weeks, and give him the money. Go to the room and sit tight."

When we turned onto Park from 49th Street, I told the driver not to hit the doorman lineup of cabs, just to drop us in the double lane. His orders were to whip into 50th Street and wait by the hotel garage entrance. We were in the revolving doors in seconds, and I sent Jeepers up the stairs to the main lobby. I ducked down the steps to the lower shopping mall and hopped it to the Towers garage entryway. My hackie was waiting and we zinged east again.

I was sure I had ducked the tail, but the Waldorf ploy served two purposes. It saved Jeepers from answering any embarrassing questions about residence, and it set me free. Jaffee said I was in, but at the moment, I was out, bubby, way out, and winging it.

I left the cab at Third and 83rd Street and walked a block east to a cozy German restaurant that caters to the Herrenvolk of Yorkville. The innkeeper is a shortish bald man named Otto, who makes a specialty of bad memory, good food, and small back rooms.

First I hit the phone, called my joint, and got Barry Kantrowitz on the line. Barry is my ex-agent, present partner, and a worrywart par excellence.

"What's going with you, Chick?" he says, telling me the cops have been in looking for me and Jeepers.

"Ignore them. You never heard of us. Barry, is Christy Balek still a big agent in soaps?"

"From what I hear you couldn't book a birddog without her. What a specialty—and I had to handle comics."

"Remorse will get you nowhere. Can you dig up her phone number, her home number?"

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"No agent in his right mind gives out his home number."

I told him to get it quick and call me back, and he did about two vodkas later. Christy Blake is an anomaly in show business. Number one, she is a lady, and then the degree from Radcliffe adds to the confusion. She also has the benefit of independence, because her grandpop worked hard on Wall Street and spelled her name right in his last will and testament.

"Chick Kelly?" she said after the maid called her to the phone.

"You make it sound like I'm calling from a hole in Forest Lawn. How are you, Christy? How would you like some of that German chow you love so much?"

She is as quick a study as any actor she handles. "Are you mixed up in that Powers mess?"

Now here I have to put on a diplomatic hat. Never tell a woman that you need her help to help another woman. Lionesses, pantheresses, and the two-legged breed of the female species will kill to protect a man, but when it comes to helping other broads, forget it. The ironic part of it is that women understand it, expect it, and respect it.

"No, but I think Billy Tibbs might have to take some heat," I said. "Do you book anyone on 'River of Life'?"

"Cal McKittrick, Ginny Owens, and Wyler Groves."

"The anti-trust boys will be investigating you. Why don't you jump in a cab and have dinner with me? I'm in a place that has the best *Eisbein mit Sauerkraut* you'll ever taste."

"I don't know if I want to taste it."

"Are you kidding? My friend Otto would be offended. It's the favorite dish of Westphalia. You may not believe it, Christy, but there is a stained-glass window in a Westphalian church that shows the disciples at the Last Supper eating *Eisbein*. Now that's a reconsideration, isn't it?"

She laughed, so I knew she was following the lure. "And if you're a real good girl I'll have Otto serve some *Erbenpuree.*"

"Chick, you're making this up."

"Would a simple jester lie?"

"What's the address, you nut?"

I gave it to her and reeled her in.

She had cold *Swartzkatz* and I stuck with the vodka.

"This is delicious, Chick," she said, savoring the pickled pork and yellow split peas. "I'm afraid I'll have a cardiac arrest if I eat all this."

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"Otto has a pickup service deal with Lenox Hill Hospital, so chow down. What can you tell me about 'River of Life'?"

"Really, Chick, I only know what my clients tell me. Wyler Groves called me a couple of days ago complaining about possible changes in the show. That's one of Wyler's problems. He always thinks he's a better scriptwriter. He wanted me to talk to Walt Powers about taking a new direction in the script. He's Dr. Danner, you know. He wanted to expand it into a medical-center locale."

"Which would mean goodbye Martin Family players."

"Maybe goodbye everyone in the long run."

"Was Powers buying Wyler's ideas?"

"I doubt it. He was too vain for that. But you can bet he was making some dramatic changes. The show has become a drag."

"Christy, somehow I can't see an actor committing murder over a part."

"Mr. Kelly, your naivete is busting out all over. When he was reviewing plays, Alex Woollcott used to say that if he was found dead with a knife in his chest, three hundred and sixty actors would immediately be suspect. Maybe Tippy Grant and this new girl, Jabbers something, could get other work, but not the rest of them. Why, Cal, Wyler, and Ginny have been on 'River of Life' for fifteen years. That's good work, but deadly typecasting. Do you know, I can't get them any on-camera commercials because the ad agencies say they are too heavily identified with the characters they play on the show? Cal and Ginny *are* Mother and Father Martin, Wyler *is* Dr. Danner. If they were killed off in the script, they might as well retire."

"That's some theory, Christy, but it's got a big flaw. If Powers was knocked off, wouldn't that be the end of the show, anyway?"

"Actors are emotional children, Chick. If they can't have it, no one can have it. It's even worse with soap-opera people. It's about the steadiest work around, but for the life of me I can't see why an actor would want to be part of one. It's not like the movies or Broadway. There you have a locked-in role—the same lines, same mood and personality. But on a soap you're a continuing character with different things coming at you every day. It's like living two lives at once. Lord, as if one wasn't enough. But don't get hung up on just actors. Your pal Billy Tibbs has a lot to gain."

"Tibbs?"

"Well, you said on the phone he might have to take some heat.

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I thought you meant that with Powers gone, so was 'River of Life,' which was a thorn on his path to a vice-presidency."

"I'm listening, babe, but I don't dig it."

"Charles Xavier Kelly, for a comic you certainly are dense at times. Putting Tibbs on that show was like putting an albatross around his neck. Powers had control and the contract. If he continued the old-fashioned slop, and the show sank, Tibbs would sink with it. The networks always need a scapegoat. Tibbs is really hyped on game shows, anyway."

"You know, you're smarter than a few cops I know. Tell me, how good is Cal McKittrick—Pop Martin?"

"Good? Hmmm." She sipped some wine. "What do you mean by 'good'?"

"Well, he put on one beauty of a performance when the kid missed his cue while he was off finding the body. Is he that sharp at improvisation?"

"If you asked Cal to improvise a tree, he'd have to study one for three days. No, I don't think he's the Actor's Studio type."

"Okay, now for dear old Ma Martin. Ginny Owens isn't that old, is she? She's a very handsome woman."

"She'd love you for that, Chick. But then, she'd love you anyway, because you're pretty. That's her problem."

"I'm beautiful, not merely pretty. Haven't you read my notices?"

"Beautiful I reserve for the champagne types. Did you know she was once Mrs. Walter Powers?"

"Ho boy, the plot sickens. Who divorced who?"

"Whom. She did the suing, but she was too entrenched in the part for Walt to drop her."

"You sure have done a lot of thinking about this, Christy."

"Well, the evening papers quoted some lieutenant as saying the murder could only have been committed by someone in the theater at the time, and that he suspects a member of the cast."

It also told me why Jaffee was so free about letting us go. He plants that line with the press, then sees who jumps.

I turned down Christy's invitation to a bash over at the Dakota and put her in a cab after dinner.

It was almost nine o'clock, and I decided to check in with Jeepers at the Waldorf. That, however, turned out to be impossible, because she had never checked in at the Waldorf. I went from the hotel operator to the desk clerk and finally to Ron Dugan in Security. No Miss Jordan. So I had picked a hotel with four entrances

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and she turned one of them into an exit. Why?

Since the cops had already given the club a toss looking for me, I figured it was safe to go in the back way through the kitchen. When I walked into the office, I was surprised to find Mrs. Mangerton there. She was typing away on an old manual typewriter that must have been used by Richard Harding Davis.

"I brought it from home, so there's no charge," she tells me.

"What are you going to do with the calculator, turn it in for an abacus?"

She doesn't answer and goes on clickety-clicking with the machine. Then I spot the note on my desk: Call Steve Kozak. The typewriter lady tells me "an hour ago."

Steve is a good friend. He has another title: Sergeant, Vice Squad, New York Police Department. He's the kind of guy who lets friendship interfere with his work, thank God.

"What's going on this Walt Powers job?" I ask him when he gets on the line. Normally Steve is a great comeback artist, but this time his voice is dead-serious.

"Chick, you got big trouble. They picked up your girl friend."

"I could have predicted that, because she didn't follow orders. Jaffee can't do much. She didn't leave the city, did she?"

"Chick, they're holding her for Murder One."

"For Powers? That's nuts. She—"

"Not just for Powers, Chick. For a guy named Sigmund Kraft over in Brooklyn."

Mrs. Mangerton's clicking made hearing difficult, so I told her to quit for the day and had Steve repeat what he had just said. It came back just like the original, word for word.

Jaffee's strategy had been to turn everyone loose and then hit them one by one on their home turfs. When one of his goons is climbing the stairs of Kraft's Bensonhurst roominghouse, who is descending but the lady in my life? The bull escorts Jeepers back to Kraft's room and they find him very dead with a knife in his back. Just to round out the scenario, Steve tells me that they also found a wastepaper basket in which paper had been burned.

"It's still nuts. Jeepers wouldn't kill anyone—at least, not over a part."

"Oh, you're onto that angle."

"What angle?"

"Jaffee's motive theory. A guy named Tibbs told Jaffee that Powers was working on a new format for the show and that

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meant someone was going to get killed off in the script."

"From what I hear, McKittrick, Groves, and Owens had more to lose."

"Maybe, but they weren't at a Bensonhurst roominghouse this evening."

"Who says? Jeepers could have come after the killing."

"That's her story. She claims Kraft approached her at the studio and told her he had something important for her, and gave her his address. When she got there, she found him dead, and decided to fade."

"What could a maintenance guy, a sweeper, have that was so important?"

"A carbon copy of Powers' script revision, maybe. Jaffee figures it this way: Powers finished his rewrite, but he dumps the carbons. Tibbs says he always worked that way because the original would be so blue-penciled after rewrites that the carbon would be useless. The only reason there is a carbon is because the network uses pre-carboned sheets. You know, the original and the copy bound together with a carbon in the middle."

"Yeah, I have them here."

"Do you want the rest, Chick? You sound awful."

"I feel awful. Shoot."

"Okay. So Powers decides to give your girl friend the ax, and he takes her to lunch to hand her the bad news. While Powers is out, Kraft empties the wastebasket, sees the carbons, and decides to make some points with Jeepers by telling her about her impending doom. So he saves them.

"When Powers and the girl get back from lunch, she takes advantage of the first part of the show being on tape, goes into Powers' office, stabs him, then burns what she thinks is the only copy of the script. Then old Sigmund sees a chance for blackmail instead of points-making, and he lays it on her. When she goes to his place to pay off, she just repeats the afternoon's performance."

"Blackmail—she wouldn't—"

"She had three one-hundred-buck bills on her, but I guess it wasn't enough."

"You know, you said 'theory,' and that's all it is, Steve."

"Would you believe the lab reports show that the papers burned in Kraft's wastebasket *were* the carbons of the papers burned in Powers' office?"

"No prints on the knives?"

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"Nope."

"How about alibis for McKittrick, Groves, and Owens?"

"They all say that they were at their apartments, but with nc corroborating witnesses."

"I thought Jaffee had us all tailed?"

"What do you think he has working for him, an army? He wa: going to pick 'em off one by one later this evening. Chick, it look: open and shut for Jeepers. Man, does she mean that much to you' You may have to face it in the end, pal."

I didn't answer. I couldn't. Steve's parting words were that Jaf fee had a warrant out for me as accessory.

I called Ted Summers at home, gave him the fill-in, and he saic he'd see what he could do. Bail for Jeepers was definitely out, h thought.

I switched over to the house phone and told Nibs, the nigh barman, to bring back lotsa vodka.

I'm on the think like never before. I've had people double-dea me. I have made wrong bets on humans and been hurt. But can't sell short on the Jeep. I start doing a reconstruct inside my head. It's my mental viewing room, where I sometimes look at the day's rushes. I see the set, the cast, Powers' office. All pieces anc bits that won't edit into a story line. It won't because they have cast the wrong girl as heavy. Or have they? If only she had tolc me about Kraft, I could have bought him off.

Then two things hit me at once. Kraft said he had something tc show her. But when did he say it? Before or after Powers' mur der? The second idea is dangerous, because if Jeepers did it, i would hang her. I decided to play it that she was innocent anc that I could prove it.

On Mrs. Mangerton's desk is a little card file with the name: and phone numbers of all our dealers in office supplies. I let the fingers do the walking and after a ten-minute phone conversatior with a very polite guy, I felt I had half the battle won.

I called Ted Summers back and gave him the plan. At first he said Jaffee would never agree to getting everyone back to the studio, but he doesn't know Bullethead like I do. Jaffee would fil Shea Stadium with live goldfish to turn me in for a couple o years. Ted called back and was surprised the lieutenant hac agreed. I wasn't.

I got to the studio after midnight on purpose. Everyone else involved was on the set. Ginny Owens must have been hauled out o

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bed, because her hair was a mess. Wyler Groves looked his usual spiffy self, and I think Cal McKittrick was a little snockered. Billy Tibbs just looked worried. I didn't like seeing Jeepers with cuffs on her.

"Take those off first," I said to Jaffee, "or it's no go."

"You've got ten minutes, funny boy, before you get a pair yourself, so let's have this big secret of yours."

Ted Summers looked at me and nodded a "don't fight it" message, so I dove into my act.

In a way it was like a Sunday Broadway performance. The kind show-biz people put on for their own. It's an all-professional audience, so you have to be good.

"Boys and girls, we have a fairy tale going here, and Uncle Chick is going to bring some reality to it. First I want to compliment you all on your performances. One of you should get a double-headed Emmy for faking innocence."

"Get on with it, Kelly," Jaffee heckled.

"Sure. Scene One. Jeepers goes to lunch with Walt Powers. What did you talk about, babe?"

"Well, mostly how well I was doing. I guess he liked my looks."

"Okay, when did Kraft tell you he had something interesting to tell you?"

"Right after I got back from lunch."

"That was *before* the murder. Can you think of any reason he would want you to come out to his place in Brooklyn?"

"To give me this information? I don't know, Chick," she said, giving me that baby-face pout.

"Remind me to give you a lecture on taking candy and rides from strangers. But let's say he had good news for you, like you were going to be very important in the new format, and he decides to make a little hay with the news.

"But when Powers takes the long count, and Kraft has the carbon to the script that spells out who is going to get the ax on the show, he tries a blackmail scheme on that person and gets it in the back. Now, both the original and the carbon copy are destroyed, so it's eenie-meenie-miney-mo, and Jeepers gets tapped because she follows up on the invitation that Kraft probably forgot.

"So far, folks, we haven't solved anything, because we don't know what Powers wrote. But we will."

That grabbed them, even Jaffee.

"Kelly, if you've been withholding evidence, so help me—"

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"You have the evidence, Jaffee, not me. Roll it in, Ted."

Summers wheels in Powers' typewriter and its stand. I held my breath and gave it a quick look. Was my memory right? It is, because Powers' machine is the same model as Mrs. Mangerton's new one.

"How many old flicks have you seen where a typewriter gave a killer away? A broken letter or a letter out of alignment—stuff like that. Now, I have a little old lady who works in my office, and she's always complaining about modern things. But there is something to be said for advanced technology after all. On an old-style model the ribbon keeps reversing itself and works until the ink is too light. Just a few hours ago I had a conversation with a courteous typewriter dealer who confirmed something. *This* electric model, in its mania for conspicuous consumption, has the tape going through the machine *only once.* I know, because I get bills for changing my ribbon every month. In fact, it isn't even a ribbon; it's a strip of carbonized tape, and it records everything typed on it. Case closed, Jaffee."

Sure I sweated bullets of five different calibers while the police technicians unloaded the ribbon and read it like a ticker tape. Whether the cops could make it stick with Ginny Owens was debatable, but for the moment she was bankrupt in the freedom department. It seems old Walt finally paid her off. In the new format she was destined to be killed on the show, and her death would serve as a bridge to a medical locale.

Ginny did not like being a bridge to her own oblivion. She was shaky enough when Jaffee's boys led her out, so he might get a confession out of her. At least Bullethead had a working motive more solid than the gossamer stuff he had tried on Jeepers.

"You know, it could have been me, Chick darling," the Jeep coos later at my pad.

I didn't answer her, the same way I didn't answer Steve Kozak. Barry Kantrowitz always says that "Life is like the Queen of Sheba. She comes to test you with hard questions."

But I'm a comic, not a philosopher, so I mixed her another mimosa and tossed her a gag line. Somehow it's okay if you always keep 'em laughing, folks.

"Q"

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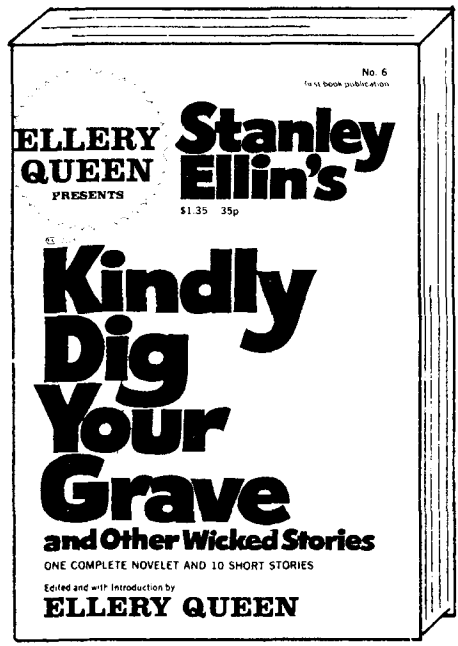

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

A COPPOLA BREAKS: Joe Gores, for many years a private detective in San Francisco, is a long-time fan of Dashiell Hammett, who also worked as a private operative for Pinkerton in the Bay City. Gores decided to use the real-life Hammett as a fictional detective in his novel *Hammett* (Putnam, $7.95). The film rights have just been sold to Francis Ford Coppola, who achieved a modicum of success with a little thing called *The Godfather.* Gores is pleased about the projected film. So pleased, in fact, that he said, "My Coppola runneth over."

QUITS: David Toma, the Newark policeman whose colorful exploits served as the basis for a television series has been signed to make acting appearances on *Police Story, Police Woman,* and *Joe Forrester.* After 19 years on the force, he has turned in his badge for television.

A STUDY IN GOLD: Dr. Watson, a recent discovery indicates, may have been a little smarter than he is usually credited with being. He did a good, solid job of bringing Jefferson Hope to justice in a sensational tale of Mormon retribution. If that sounds a little like the first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet,* gone awry, it is. In a long play written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (originally titled *A Study in Scarlet,* then renamed *Angels of Darkness*), the good doctor sparkles as the detective, with no assistance from his old sidekick and mentor. There is only one copy of *Angels of Darkness*—the original handwritten manuscript—and you can have it for the catalogued price of $50,000, plus postage, from the noted New York bookseller, Lew David Feldman of The House of El Dieff.

INSIDIOUS PERIODICAL: In the previous column, the magazine devoted to Sherlock Holmes, *The Baker Street Journal,* was mentioned. It seems only fair to give equal time to the other side of the coin of crime. The ultimate criminal, the fiendish Dr. Fu Manchu, has a journal devoted to his life, works and associates, including Sax Rohmer, who wrote the adventures. *The Rohmer Review* is

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issued on an indeterminable schedule, and subscriptions ($2.25 for three issues) are available from Robert E. Briney, 4 Forest Avenue, Salem, Mass. 01970. It provides ample opportunities to hiss the insidious doctor (or to cheer him, if you're that type).

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"I hear of Sherlock everywhere." The refrain has never been louder. The popularity of Gene Wilder's *Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* has spawned even greater cinematic interest in the Greatest Detective. Happily the Wilder spoof is affectionate: while sheer madness swirls around him Holmes is played absolutely straight, and allows Douglas Wilmer to return to the role he handled so solidly in the 1965 BBC-TV series. Other ventures are circulating: possibilities of TV series based on Solar Pons and Julian Symons' flamboyant, Holmesian actor-detective Sheridan Haymes, met first in *Three-Pipe Problem*. Jack Haley, Jr.'s late-night TV documentaries on great detectives will devote a solo hour to Holmes. Unfortunately, Joseph Cates' long announced two-hour Holmesian NBC special, to star Robert Shaw (with Donald Pleasance as Watson) and to be largely based on "A Scandal in Bohemia" (though rights to two other stories from the Canon were bought), is now reportedly dormant because of Shaw's post-*Jaws* commitments. Some apprehensiveness awaits Producer Frank *(Black Frankenstein)* Salerti's *Sherlock Holmes and the Golden Vampire,* setting up our hero with a distracting 35-year-old Mrs. Hudson and Count Dracula.

Anticipation runs higher for the Christmas release of the Universal film being made at Pinewood Studios, England, of Nicholas Meyer's *Seven-Per-Cent Solution*. Meyer is absolutely delighted with the casting and production crew; he had never really enjoyed Holmesian films before, but Nicol Williamson, his detective, is "unquestionably the closest thing to Doyle I've seen on the screen." A splendid cast has been assembled around Williamson, including Alan Arkin as Freud and Laurence Olivier as Moriarty, in the plot to pack Holmes off to Vienna and cure his drug addiction, and such on-the-mark casting of lesser roles as Samantha Eggar as Mrs. Watson. Choosing Robert Duval to play the pivotal Watson was a surprise, but Director Herbert *(Funny Lady)* Ross wanted to get away from the "Nigel Bruce image," and at any rate Duval's accent was virtually undetectable, very English. The

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mystery Holmes and Freud solve is somewhat altered from the book, but the fantastic train chase at the climax is intact, filmed on a working antique rail line. Interestingly enough, the curator of the Freud Museum in Vienna was concerned that people would think Holmes really *did* consult with Freud!

Holmes' is not the only legend growing. John Gardner's *The Return of Moriarty* has been scripted by Erik Lee Preminger as *Limehouse*, with Michael Caine involved in royal assassination.

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INTERVIEW: ROBERT BLOCH

One of the most popular and successful writers in the world of mystery, crime, suspense and macabre fiction, Robert Bloch is also one of the most prolific. He has written about 400 short stories, more than 20 novels, 10 films and nearly 75 television programs. His most famous book is *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller.

EQMM: In what way did the success of *Psycho* change your life?

BLOCH: *Psycho* pasted a label on my forehead which made me an identifiable commodity as far as Hollywood was concerned. I was already writing TV in Hollywood and was well into my first motion picture before *Psycho* was released, so it didn't bring me there. The film, by the way, was regarded as a disaster before it was released. Later, everybody was up there taking bows, and a little of it rubbed off on me. *Psycho* gave me an identity which can also be a curse.

The late great Boris Karloff once pointed out the parallel in our careers. "I had been a member of my profession for 25 years," he said, "without obtaining any particular prominence. Then, suddenly, overnight, I was known because I was identified with Frankenstein's monster. I'll always be grateful to the poor old monster." And I'll always be grateful to poor old Norman Bates.

EQMM: Does it bother you to have that one-book label pinned on you, when in fact you've written so much?

BLOCH: I don't worry about it too much. Before *Psycho* I was known as the author of "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" which had been dramatized and put on radio and anthologized to death. That didn't bother me either.

EQMM: The main character and events of *Psycho* have some basis in fact, haven't they?

BLOCH: Yes. I was living in a small town in central Wisconsin and one day I picked up the weekly newspaper and read about a middle-aged man who had been discovered with a woman hanging in his shed, dressed out like a deer. They found that he had all

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sorts of little souvenirs: a jar of 14 human noses, lampshades made of human skin—that sort of thing. But his neighbors just regarded him as good old Ed Gein, who babysits with the children and who often came around with gifts of fresh liver, which they thought he got through deer-hunting. Once I knew about the series of crimes, I tried to imagine how he could conceal them, and what would trigger them in the first place. Everything fell into place, and I wrote for six weeks, sent it out, and that was that. Years later I learned that I had come very close to actuality, only he was a much farther-out character than I had imagined. So, I ask you, what kind of sick mind does it take to dream up something like that?

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This month, for the first time in our own poker game, I have been dealt four of a kind, all big ones. Let's get it straight. Though very different in mood, pace, background, and technique, all four books under discussion have at least two features in common. Each tells a gripping human story which will hold you to the end. And each *(mirabile dictu!)* is a true detective novel, with formidable problem solved by deduction from visible clues or by police routine intelligently directed.

You may prefer one approach; you may prefer another. That's a matter of taste, which must always be left open. These four items have been ranked according to the order in which your mentor most enjoyed them, it being understood that I enjoyed and approved them all.

Loren Mensing, still-young professor of jurisprudence in *Publish and Perish,* by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. (Putnam, $6.95), engages our sympathy as he tries his wits on an exciting murder mystery in the classic style of *Trent's Last Case* or *Calamity Town.*

As a working lawyer before his academic employment, Loren has drawn mutual wills for Graham Dillaway and Dillaway's new wife, Hope Foxworth, both successful novelists of erratic personality.

It's a deadly business. When Dillaway dies in that mountain-hut fire, together with some man of dubious antecedents, Loren is hired to unravel the tangle. Though he finds a girl he believed he had lost, the deadly business grows even deadlier until somebody's grimace in an elevator provides the last link.

Don't think you have solved everything until it's all over; Mr. Nevins, a newcomer already master of his craft, has set traps for the overconfident as well as the unwary. This very sophisticated

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performance, told with absolute fair play and much charm of style, offers the most attractive mystery in months.

Despite its exotic setting and atmosphere, John Wyllie's *The Butterfly Flood* (Doubleday, $5.95) follows the same fair-play pattern.

In the emerging West African republic of Akhana, still haunted by ancient beliefs, our attention centers on big Dr. Quarshie, wise, tolerant, highly cultured African physician who serves as healer, national conscience, and, when necessary, detective.

When the headless body of an unknown white man is found on a sacred rock beside the river, it may be tribal ceremony or some less formal cause. Colorful characters, white mingling with the black, whirl in their *danse macabre* against a background vividly described by one who knows it well.

The tempo increases on every page. How our stout-hearted Dr. Quarshie takes up a murderer's trail, from the first revealing clue to the last pursuit and its climax among the crocodiles, are notable features of another attractive mystery worth your attention.

As we join the cutthroat turmoil of *The Wilful Lady,* by R. G. Jeffreys (Walker, $6.95), we are whisked back through time to the boisterous England of the year 1802, during one brief interlude of peace with Napoleon.

A beautiful red-haired girl escapes from captivity on shipboard in the Thames off Wapping, not long before Lieutenant Robert Kemble, Royal Navy retired, is stabbed in his frowsy lodging nearby. Once more we investigate with Jeremy Sturrock, swaggering Bow Street Runner as formidable to wrongdoers as he is irresistible to women.

Red-haired Lydia, wilful American heiress, has become enmeshed in plots against her life, her fortune, her good name. Aided by Dr. Ian McGrath, the young Scot who loves Lydia, Sturrock plunges in to foil the plotters. If much of the speech seems cruder than need be, if formal police tactics did not yet exist, this pre-Scotland Yard sleuth unmasks several villains for the spectacular and satisfactory end.

Though murder victims dating back thirty years are unearthed from one grave in Richard Forrest's *A Child's Garden of Death* (Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95), this ancient crime has immediate and grim application to the present day.

Investigating three buried corpses, Rocco Herbert, police chief in rural Connecticut, enlists the help of his old friend Lyon Wentworth. Wentworth, picturesque author whose hobby is ballooning and his wife a state senator, has the right gift. With both amateur and professional using police resources to supplement their wits, they uncover plots updated as well as backdated, and trap their quarry in this admirable exercise of narrative skill.

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VIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE BUGLES BLOWING, by Nicolas Freeling. Harper & Row, $7.95

A first-rate and moving suspense tale by the Edgar Award-winning author of *A Dressing of Diamond*. Castang's investigation of baffling murder leads him not only to the hallowed offices of several high-ranking government officials but all the way to the office of the President of France.

"Intelligent, interesting . . . fascinating in its psychological implications."—*Publishers Weekly*

"The best exposition I know of French Criminal Law."—*C. P. Snow, The Financial Times*

"It remains obvious that Mr. Freeling is the most exciting writer in crime-fiction working today."—*The Birmingham Post*

"Very superior."—*The Observer*

THE PACKAGE INCLUDED MURDER. A Novel of Suspense Featuring the Honourable Constance Morrison-Burke, by Joyce Porter. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95

A very funny suspense novel in which the Hon. Con takes an Intourist tour of Russia. During fascinating visits to mulch factories and vivisection laboratories (monkeys), the pulchritudinous Penelope Cough-Cooper is murderously attacked six times. To her dismay the Hon. Con insists upon protecting her night and day, but even the Hon. Con cannot prevent the murder that was bound to happen. But then she jovially set about solving it, one-upping Superintendent Mellors, showing that the least likely victim was murdered by the most-likely villain.

MASTERS OF MYSTERY, ed. by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95

This 30th Anniversary Volume in the series of semi-annual anthologies derived from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* contains 3 short novels, 3 novelets, and 9 short stories. The collection contains a wide range of detective-crime stories written by such masters of mystery as Rex Stout, Ross Macdonald, Georges Simenon, Hugh Pentecost, Edward D. Hoch, Joyce Porter, Nedra Tyre, Jacob Hay, P.D. James, and the master himself, Ellery Queen. Like every previous anthology in the series, *Masters of Mystery* contains only stories that meet the exacting standards maintained by EQMM for over 34 years.

THE DAY THAT I DIE. A Novel of Suspense, by P. F. Kluge. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95

The colonel had gone to Peleliu on government business. On the first night he is ambushed and bayoneted to death. He'd been a war hero and a public figure, so the press swarms in. Only Marshall Booker, "a master writer masquerading as a journalist," remains to find out the truth behind the press handouts. The search for the murderous band is complicated by World War II Japanese stragglers and government officials struggling with the locals for control. Booker unwittingly sets off the spark that turns the island into a turmoil and seals his own destiny as well.

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FOUR DAYS. A Novel by Harold King. Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95

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A CASE OF SPIRITS, by Peter Lovesey. Dodd, Mead, $5.95

The newest of "those wonderful Victorian background stories about Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackery" (San Francisco Chronicle) combines art theft and the supernatural. The oil painting that had vanished belonged to a man of eminence and reputation who had been dabbling in the occult. There was reason to think those who contrived spirits might also have contrived burglary. When violent death interrupts a "spiritual session" in his house, the police march in. A challenging and entertaining murder mystery for connoisseurs of crime.

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a *NEW* suspense story by

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Elinor, newly widowed, and her four-year-old son Chris were living in a rented house in Connecticut. The house had a garden and a pond—a strange sinister pond. This is a peculiarly haunting story, and the image of the pond will stay in the back of your mind, on the screen of your memory, for a long time, perhaps forever . . .

THE POND

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Elinor Sievert stood looking down at the pond. Was it safe? For Chris? The real-estate agent had said it was four feet deep. It was certainly full of weeds, its surface nearly covered with algae or whatever they called the little oval green things that floated. Well, four feet was enough to drown a four-year-old. She must warn Chris.

She lifted her head and walked back toward the white two-story house. She had just rented the house, and had been here only since yesterday. She hadn't entirely unpacked. Hadn't the agent said something about draining the pond, that it wouldn't be too difficult or expensive? Was there a spring under it? Elinor hoped not, because she'd taken the house for six months.

It was two in the afternoon, and Chris was having his nap. There were more kitchen cartons to unpack, also the record player in its neat taped carton. Elinor fished the record player out, connected it, and chose an LP of New Orleans jazz to pick her up. She hoisted another load of dishes up to the long drainboard.

The doorbell rang.

Elinor was confronted by the smiling face of a woman about her own age.

"Hello. I'm Jane Caldwell—one of your neighbors. I just wanted

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to say hello and welcome. We're friends of Jimmy Adams, the agent, and he told us you'd moved in here."

"Yes. My name's Elinor Sievert. Won't you come in?" Elinor held the door wider. "I'm not quite unpacked as yet—but at least we could have a cup of coffee in the kitchen."

Within a few minutes they were sitting on opposite sides of the wooden table, cups of instant coffee before them. Jane said she had two children, a boy and a girl, the girl just starting school, and that her husband was an architect and worked in Hartford.

"What brought you to Luddington?" Jane asked.

"I needed a change—from New York. I'm a freelance journalist, so I thought I'd try a few months in the country. At least I call this the country, compared to New York."

"I can understand that. I heard about your husband," Jane said on a more serious note. "I'm sorry. Especially since you have a small son. I want you to know we're a friendly batch around here, and at the same time we'll let you alone, if that's what you want. But consider Ed and me neighbors, and if you need something, just call on us."

"Thank you," Elinor said. She remembered that she'd told Adams that her husband had recently died, because Adams had asked if her husband would be living with her. Now Jane was ready to go, not having finished her coffee.

"I know you've got things to do, so I don't want to take any more of your time," said Jane. She had rosy cheeks, chestnut hair. "I'll give you Ed's business card, but it's got our home number on it too. If you want to ask any kind of question, just call us. We've been here six years. —Where's your little boy?"

"He's—"

As if on cue Chris called, "Mommy!" from the top of the stairs.

Elinor jumped up. "Come down, Chris. Meet a nice new neighbor."

Chris came down the stairs a bit timidly, holding onto the banister.

Jane stood beside Elinor at the foot of the staircase. "Hello, Chris. My name's Jane. How are you?"

Chris's blue eyes examined her seriously. "Hello."

Elinor smiled. "I think he just woke up and doesn't know where he is. Say 'How do you do,' Chris."

"How do you do," said Chris.

"Hope you'll like it here, Chris," Jane said. "I want you to

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meet my boy Bill. He's just your age. Bye-bye, Elinor. Bye, Chris." Jane went out the front door.

Elinor gave Chris his glass of milk and his treat—today a bowl of applesauce. Elinor was against chocolate cupcakes every afternoon, though Chris at the moment thought they were the greatest food ever invented. "Wasn't she nice? Jane?" Elinor said, finishing her coffee.

"Who is she?"

"One of our new neighbors." Elinor continued her unpacking Her article-in-progress was about self-help with legal problems She would need to go to the Hartford library, which had a newspaper department, for more research. Hartford was only a half hour away. Elinor had bought a good second-hand car. Maybe Jane would know a girl who could baby-sit now and then. "Isn't it nicer here than in New York?"

Chris lifted his blond head. "I want to go outside."

"But of course. It's so sunny you won't need a sweater. We've got a garden, Chris. We can plant—radishes, for instance." She remembered planting radishes in her grandmother's garden when she was small, remembered the joy of pulling up the fat red and white roots—edible. "Come on, Chris." She took his hand.

Chris's slight frown went away as he gripped his mother's hand

Elinor looked at the garden with different eyes, Chris's eyes Plainly no one had tended the garden for months. There were big prickly weeds between the jonquils that were beginning to open and the peonies hadn't been cut last year. But there was an apple tree big enough for Chris to climb in.

"Our garden," Elinor said. "Nice and sloppy. All yours to play in, Chris, and the summer's just beginning."

"How big is this?" Chris asked He had broken away and was stooped by the pond.

Elinor knew he meant how deep was it. "I don't know. Not very deep. But don't go wading. It's not like the seashore with sand It's all muddy there." Elinor spoke quickly. Anxiety had struck her like a physical pain. Was she still reliving the impact of Cliff's plane against the mountainside—that mountain in Yugoslavia that she'd never see? She'd seen two or three newspaper photographs of it, blotchy black and white chaos, indicating, as the print underneath said, the wreckage of the airliner on which there had been no survivors of 107 passengers plus eight crewmembers and stewardesses.

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No survivors. And Cliff among them. Elinor had always thought air crashes happened to strangers, never to anyone you knew, never even to a friend of a friend. Suddenly it had been Cliff, on an ordinary flight from Ankara. He'd been to Ankara at least seven times before.

"Is that a snake? Look, Mommy!" Chris yelled, leaning forward as he spoke. One foot sank, his arms shot forward for balance, and suddenly he was in water up to his hips. "Ugh! Ha-ha!" He rolled sideways on the muddy edge and squirmed backward up to the level of the lawn before his mother could reach him.

Elinor set him on his feet. "Chris, I told you not to try wading! Now you'll need a bath. You see?"

"No, I won't!" Chris yelled, laughing, and ran off across the grass, his bare legs and sandals flying, as if the muddy damp on his shorts had given him a special charge.

Elinor had to smile. Such energy! She looked down at the pond. The brown and black mud swirled, stirring long tentacles of vines, making the algae undulate. It was at least seven feet in diameter, the pond. A vine had clung to Chris's ankle as she'd pulled him up. Nasty! The vines were even growing out onto the grass to a length of three feet or more.

Before five p.m. Elinor phoned the rental agent. She asked if it would be all right with the owner if she had the pond drained. Price wasn't of much concern to her, but she didn't tell Adams that.

"It might seep up again," said Adams. "The land's pretty low. Especially when it rains and—"

"I really don't mind trying it. It might help," Elinor said. "You know how it is with a small child. I have the feeling it isn't quite safe."

Adams said he would telephone a company tomorrow morning. "Even this afternoon, if I can reach them."

He telephoned back in ten minutes and told Elinor that the workmen would arrive the next morning, probably quite early.

The workmen came at eight a.m. After speaking with the two men, Elinor took Chris with her in the car to the library in Hartford. She deposited Chris in the children's book section, and told the woman in charge there that she would be back in an hour for Chris, and in case he got restless she would be in the newspaper archives.

When she and Chris got back home, the pond was empty but

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muddy. If anything, it looked worse, uglier. It was a crater of wet mud laced with green vines, some as thick as a cigarette. The depression in the garden was hardly four feet deep. But how deep was the mud?

"I'm sad," said Chris, gazing down.

Elinor laughed. "Sad? —The pond's not the only thing to play with. Look at the trees we've got! What about the seeds we bought? What do you say we clear a patch and plant some carrots and radishes—now?"

Elinor changed into blue jeans. The clearing of weeds and the planting took longer than she had thought it would, nearly two hours. She worked with a fork and a trowel, both a bit rusty, which she'd found in the toolshed behind the house. Chris drew a bucket of water from the outside faucet and lugged it over, but while she and Chris were putting the seeds carefully in, one inch deep, a roll of thunder crossed the heavens. The sun had vanished. Within seconds rain was pelting down, big drops that made them run for the house.

"Isn't that wonderful? Look!" Elinor held Chris up so he could see out a kitchen window. "We don't need to water our seeds. Nature's doing it for us."

"Who's nature?"

Elinor smiled, tired now. "Nature rules everything. Nature knows best. The garden's going to look fresh and new tomorrow."

The following morning the garden did look rejuvenated, the grass greener, the scraggly rosebushes more erect. The sun was shining again. And Elinor had her first letter. It was from Cliff's mother in Evanston. It said:

"Dearest Elinor,

"We both hope you are feeling more cheerful in your Connecticut house. Do drop us a line or telephone us when you find the time, but we know you are busy getting settled, not to mention getting back to your own work. We send you all good wishes for success with your next articles, and you must keep us posted.

"The color snapshots of Chris in his bath are a joy to us! You mustn't say he looks more like Cliff than you. He looks like both of you . . ."

The letter lifted Elinor's spirits. She went out to see if the carrot and radish seeds had been beaten to the surface by the rain—in which case she meant to push them down again if she could see them—but the first thing that caught her eye was Chris, stooped

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again by the pond and poking at something with a stick. And the second thing she noticed was that the pond was full again. Almost as high as ever!

Well, naturally, because of the hard rain. Or was it naturally? It had to be. Maybe there was a spring below. Anyway, she thought, why should she pay for the draining if it didn't stay drained? She'd have to ring the company today. Miller Brothers, it was called.

"Chris? What're you up to?"

"Frog!" he yelled back. "I *think* I saw a frog."

"Well, don't try to catch it!" Damn the weeds! They were back in full force, as if the brief draining had done them good. Elinor went to the toolshed. She thought she remembered seeing a pair of hedge clippers on the cement floor there.

Elinor found the clippers, rusted, and though she was eager to attack the vines she forced herself to go to the kitchen first and put a couple of drops of salad oil on the center screw of the clippers. Then she went out and started on the long grapevine-like stems. The clippers were dull, but better than nothing, and still faster than scissors.

"What're you doing that for?" Chris asked.

"They're nasty things," Elinor said. "Clogging the pond. We don't want a messy pond, do we?" *Whack whack!* Elinor's espadrilles sank into the wet bank. What on earth did the owners, or the former tenants, use the pond for? Goldfish? Ducks?

A carp, Elinor thought suddenly. If the pond was going to stay a pond, then a carp was the thing to keep it clean, to nibble at some of the vegetation. She'd buy one.

"If you ever fall in, Chris—"

"What?" Chris, stooped on the other side of the pond now, flung his stick away.

"For goodness' sake, don't fall in, but if you do"— Elinor forced herself to go on—"grab hold of these vines. You see? They're strong and growing from the edges. Pull yourself out by them." Actually, the vines seemed to be growing from underwater as well, and pulling at those might send Chris deeper into the pond.

Chris grinned, sideways. "It's not deep. Not even deep as I am."

Elinor said nothing.

The rest of that morning she worked on her law article, then telephoned Miller Brothers.

"Well, the ground's a little low there, ma'am. Not to mention

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the old cesspool's nearby and it still gets the drain from the kitchen sink, even though the toilets've been put on the mains. We know that house. Pond'll get it too if you've got a washing machine in the kitchen."

Elinor hadn't. "You mean, draining it is hopeless?"

"That's about the size of it."

Elinor tried to force her anger down. "Then I don't know why you agreed to do it."

"Because you seemed set on it, ma'am."

They hung up a few seconds later. What was she going to do about the bill when they presented it? She'd perhaps make them knock it down a bit. But she felt the situation was inconclusive. And Elinor hated that.

While Chris was taking his nap, Elinor made a quick trip to Hartford, found a fish shop, and brought back a carp in a red plastic bucket which she had taken with her in the car. The fish flopped about in a vigorous way, and Elinor drove slowly, so the bucket wouldn't tip over. She went at once to the pond and poured the fish in.

It was a fat silvery carp. Its tail flicked the surface as it dove, then it rose and dove again, apparently happy in wider seas. Elinor smiled. The carp would surely eat some of the vines, the algae. She'd give it bread too. Carps could eat anything. Cliff had used to say there was nothing like carp to keep a pond or a lake clean. Above all, Elinor liked the idea that there was something *alive* in the pond besides vines.

She started to walk back to the house and found that a vine had encircled her left ankle. When she tried to kick her foot free, the vine tightened. She stooped and unwound it. That was one she hadn't whacked this morning. Or had it grown ten inches since this morning? Impossible.

But now as she looked down at the pond and at its border, she couldn't see that she had accomplished much, even though she'd fished out quite a heap. The heap was a few feet away on the grass, in case she doubted it. Elinor blinked. She had the feeling that if she watched the pond closely, she'd be able to see the tentacles growing. She didn't like that idea.

Should she tell Chris about the carp? Elinor didn't want him poking into the water, trying to find it. On the other hand, if she didn't mention it, maybe he'd see it and have some crazy idea of catching it. Better to tell him, she decided.

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So when Chris woke up Elinor told him about the fish.

"You can toss some bread to him," Elinor said. "But don't try to catch him, because he likes the pond. He's going to help us keep it clean."

"You don't want ever to catch him?" Chris asked, with milk all over his upper lip.

He was thinking of Cliff, Elinor knew. Cliff had loved fishing "We don't catch this one, Chris. He's our friend."

Elinor worked. She had set up her typewriter in a front corner room upstairs which had light from two windows. The article was coming along nicely. She had a lot of original material from newspaper clippings. The theme was to alert the public to free legal advice from small-claims offices which most people didn't know existed. Lots of people let sums like $250 go by the board, because they thought it wasn't worth the trouble of a court fight.

Elinor worked until 6:30. Dinner was simple tonight, macaroni and cheese with bacon, one of Chris's favorite dishes. With the dinner in the oven, Elinor took a quick bath and put on blue slacks and a fresh blouse. She paused to look at the photograph of Cliff on the dressing table—a photograph in a silver frame which had been a present from Cliff's parents one Christmas.

It was an ordinary black-and-white enlargement showing Cliff sitting on the bank of a stream, propped against a tree, an old straw hat tipped back on his head. The picture had been taken somewhere outside of Evanston, on one of their summer trips to visit his parents. Cliff held a straw or a blade of grass lazily between his lips. His denim shirt was open at the neck. No one, looking at the hillbilly image, would imagine that Cliff had had to dress up in white tie a couple of times a month in Paris, Rome, London, and Ankara. Cliff had been in the diplomatic service, assistant or deputy to American statesmen, and had been gifted in languages, gifted in tact.

What had Cliff done exactly? Elinor knew only sketchy anecdotes that he had told her. He had done enough, however, to be paid a good salary, to be paid to keep silent, even to her. It had crossed her mind that his plane had been wrecked to kill him, but she assured herself that was absurd. Cliff hadn't been that important. His death had been an accident, not due to the weather but to a mechanical failure in the plane.

What would Cliff have thought of the pond? Elinor smiled wryly. Would he have had it filled in with stones, turned it into a

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rock garden? Would he have filled it in with earth? Would he have paid no attention at all to the pond? Just called it "nature"?

Two days later, when Elinor was typing a final draft of her article, she stopped at noon and went out into the garden for some fresh air. She'd brought the kitchen scissors, and she cut two red roses and one white rose to put on the table at lunch. Then the pond caught her eye, a blaze of chartreuse in the sunlight.

"Good Lord!" she whispered.

The vines! The weeds! They were all over the surface. And they were again climbing onto the land. Well, this was one thing she could and would see to: she'd find an exterminator. She didn't care what poison they put down in the pond, if they could clear it. Of course she'd rescue the carp first and keep him in a bucket till the pond was safe again.

An exterminator was someone Jane Caldwell might know about.

Elinor telephoned her before she started lunch. "This *pond*," Elinor began and stopped, because she had so much to say about it. "I had it drained a few days ago, and now it's filled up again . . . No, that's not really the problem. I've given up the draining, it's the unbelievable vines. The way they grow! I wonder if you know a weed-killing company? I think it'll take a professional—I mean, I don't think I can just toss in some liquid poison and get anywhere. You'll have to see this pond to believe it. It's like a jungle!"

"I know just the right people," Jane said. "They're called 'Weed-Killer,' so it's easy to remember. You've got a phone book there?"

Elinor had. Jane said Weed-Killer was very obliging and wouldn't make her wait a week before they turned up.

"How about you and Chris coming over for tea this afternoon?" Jane asked. "I just made a coconut cake."

"Love to. Thank you." Elinor felt cheered.

She made lunch for herself and Chris, and told him they were invited to tea at the house of their neighbor Jane, and that he'd meet a boy called Bill. After lunch Elinor looked up Weed-Killer in the telephone book and rang them.

"It's a lot of weeds in a pond," Elinor said. "Can you deal with that?"

The man assured her they were experts at weeds in ponds and promised to come over the following morning. Elinor wanted to

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work for an hour or so until it was time to go to Jane's, but she felt compelled to catch the carp now, or try to. If she failed, she'd tell the men about it tomorrow, and probably they'd have a net on a long handle and could catch it. Elinor took her vegetable sieve which had a handle some ten inches long, and also some pieces of bread.

Not seeing the carp, Elinor tossed the bread onto the surface. Some pieces floated, others sank and were trapped among the vines. Elinor circled the pond, her sieve ready. She had half filled the plastic bucket and it sat on the bank.

Suddenly she saw the fish. It was horizontal and motionless, a couple of inches under the surface. It was dead, she realized, and kept from the surface only by the vines that held it under. Dead from what? The water didn't look dirty, in fact was rather clear. What could kill a carp? Cliff had always said—

Elinor's eyes were full of tears. Tears for the carp? Nonsense. Tears of frustration, maybe. She stooped and tried to reach the carp with the sieve. The sieve was a foot short, and she wasn't going to muddy her tennis shoes by wading in. Not now. Best to work a bit this afternoon and let the workmen lift it out tomorrow.

"What're you doing, Mommy?" Chris came trotting toward her.

"Nothing. I'm going to work a little now. I thought you were watching TV."

"It's no good. Where's the fish?"

Elinor took his wrist and swung him around. "The fish is fine. Now come back and we'll put on the TV again." Elinor tried to think of something else that might amuse him. It wasn't one of his napping days, obviously. "Tell you what, Chris, you choose one of your toys to take to Bill. Make him a present. All right?"

"One of *my* toys?"

Elinor smiled. Chris was generous enough by nature and she meant to nurture this trait. "Yes, one of yours. Even one you like—like your paratrooper. Or one of your books. You choose it. Bill's going to be your friend, and you want to start out right, don't you?"

"Yes." And Chris seemed to be pondering already, going over his store of goodies in his room upstairs.

Elinor locked the back door with its bolt, which was on a level with her eyes. She didn't want Chris going into the garden, maybe seeing the carp. "I'll be in my room, and I'll see you at

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four. You might put on a clean pair of jeans at four—if you remember to."

Elinor worked, and quite well. It was pleasant to have a tea date to look forward to. Soon, she thought, she'd ask Jane and her husband for drinks. She didn't want people to think she was a melancholy widow. It had been three months since Cliff's death. Elinor thought she'd got over the worst of her grief in those first two weeks, the weeks of shock. Had she really? For the past six weeks she'd been able to work. That was something. Cliff's insurance plus his pension made her financially comfortable, but she needed to work to be happy.

When she glanced at her watch it was ten to four. "Chris!" Elinor called to her half-open door. "Changed your jeans?"

She pushed open Chris's door across the hall. He was not in his room, and there were more toys and books on the floor than usual, indicating that Chris had been trying to select something to give to Bill. Elinor went downstairs where the TV was still murmuring, but Chris wasn't in the living room. Nor was he in the kitchen. She saw that the back door was still bolted. Chris wasn't on the front lawn either. Of course he could have gone to the garden by the front door. Elinor unbolted the kitchen door and went out.

"Chris?" She glanced everywhere, then focused on the pond. She had seen a light-colored patch in its center. "*Chris!*" She ran.

He was face down, feet out of sight, his blond head nearly submerged. Elinor plunged in, up to her knees, her thighs, seized Chris's legs and pulled him out, slipped, sat down in the water, and got soaked as high as her breasts. She struggled to her feet, holding Chris by the waist. Shouldn't she try to let the water run out of his mouth? Elinor was panting.

She turned Chris onto his stomach, gently lifted his small body by the waist, hoping water would run from his nose and mouth, but she was too frantic to look. He was limp, soft in a way that frightened her. She pressed his rib cage, released it, raised him a little again. One had to do artificial respiration methodically, counting, she remembered. She did this. . .fifteen. . .sixteen. . . Someone should be telephoning for a doctor. She couldn't do two things at once.

"*Help!*" she yelled. "Help me, *please!*" Could the people next door hear? The house was twenty yards away, and was anybody home?

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She turned Chris over and pressed her mouth to his cool lips. She blew in, then released his ribs, trying to catch a gasp from him, a cough that would mean life. He remained limp. She turned him on his stomach and resumed the artificial respiration. It was now or never, she knew. Senseless to waste time carrying him into the house for warmth. He could've been lying in the pond for an hour—in which case, she knew it was hopeless.

Elinor picked her son up and carried him toward the house. She went into the kitchen. There was a sagging sofa against the wall, and she put him there.

Then she telephoned Jane Caldwell, whose number was on the card by the telephone where Elinor had left it days ago. Since Elinor didn't know a doctor in the vicinity, it made as much sense to call Jane as to search for a doctor's name.

"Hello, *Jane!*" Elinor said, her voice rising wildly. "I think Chris has drowned! —Yes! *Yes!* Can you get a doctor? Right away?" Suddenly the line was dead.

Elinor hung up and went at once to Chris, started the rib pressing again, Chris now prone on the floor with his face turned to one side. The activity soothed her a little.

The doorbell rang and at the same time Elinor heard the latch of the door being opened. Then Jane called, "Elinor?"

"In the kitchen!"

The doctor had dark hair and spectacles. He lifted Chris a little, felt for a pulse. "How long—how long was he—"

"I don't know. I was working upstairs. It was the pond in the garden."

The rest was confused to Elinor. She barely realized when the needle went into her own arm, though this was the most definite sensation she had for several minutes. Jane made tea. Elinor had a cup in front of her. When she looked at the floor, Chris was not there.

"Where is he?" Elinor asked.

Jane gripped Elinor's hand. She sat opposite Elinor. "The doctor took Chris to the hospital. Chris is in good hands, you can be sure of that. This doctor delivered Bill. He's our family doctor."

But from Jane's tone Elinor knew it was all useless, and that Jane knew this too. Elinor's eyes drifted from Jane's face. She noticed a book lying on the cane bottom of the chair beside her. Chris had chosen his dotted-numbers book to give to Bill, a book that Chris rather liked. He wasn't half through doing the draw-

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ings. Chris could count and he was doing quite well at reading too. *I wasn't doing so well at his age,* Cliff had said not long ago.

Elinor began to weep.

"That's good. That's good for you," Jane said. "I'll stay here with you. Pretty soon we'll hear from the hospital. Maybe you want to lie down, Elinor? —I've got to make a phone call."

The sedative was taking effect. Elinor sat in a daze on the sofa, her head back against a pillow. The telephone rang and Jane took it. The hospital, Elinor supposed. She watched Jane's face, and knew. Elinor nodded her head, trying to spare Jane any words, but Jane said, "They tried. I'm sure they did everything possible."

Jane said she would stay the night. She said she had arranged for Ed to pick up Bill at a house where she'd left him.

In the morning Weed-Killer came, and Jane asked Elinor if she still wanted the job done.

"I thought you might've decided to move," Jane said.

Had she said that? Possibly. "But I do want it done."

The two Weed-Killer men got to work.

Jane made another telephone call, then told Elinor that a friend of hers named Millie was coming over at noon. When Millie arrived, Jane prepared a lunch of bacon and eggs for the three of them. Millie had blond curly hair, blue eyes, and was very cheerful and sympathetic.

"I went by the doctor's," Millie said, "and his nurse gave me these pills. They're a sedative. He thinks they'd be good for you. Two a day, one before lunch, one before bedtime. So have one now."

They hadn't started lunch. Elinor took one. The workmen were just departing, and one man stuck his head in the door to say with a smile, "All finished, ma'am. You shouldn't have any trouble any more."

During lunch Elinor said, "I've got to see about the funeral."

"We'll help you. Don't think about it now," Jane said. "Try to eat a little."

Elinor ate a little, then slept on the sofa in the kitchen. She hadn't wanted to go up to her own bed. When she woke up, Millie was sitting in the wicker armchair, reading a book.

"Feeling better? Want some tea?"

"In a minute. You're awfully kind. I do thank you very much." She stood up. "I want to see the pond." She saw Millie's look of uneasiness. "They killed those vines today. I'd like to see what it looks like."

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Millie went out with her. Elinor looked down at the pond and had the satisfaction of seeing that no vines lay on the surface, that some pieces of them had sunk like drowned things. Around the edge of the pond were stubs of vines already turning yellow and brownish, wilting. Before her eyes one cropped tentacle curled sideways and down, as if in the throes of death. A primitive joy went through her, a sense of vengeance, of a wrong righted.

"It's a nasty pond," Elinor said to Millie. "It killed a carp. Can you imagine? I've never heard of a carp being—"

"I know. They must've been growing like blazes. But they're certainly finished now." Millie held out her hand for Elinor to take. "Don't think about it."

Millie wanted to go back to the house. Elinor did not take her hand, but she came with Millie. "I'm feeling better. You mustn't give up all your time to me. It's very nice of you, since you don't even know me. But I've got to face my problems alone."

Millie made a polite reply.

Elinor really was feeling better. She'd have to go through the funeral next, Chris's funeral, but she sensed in herself a backbone, a morale—whatever it was called. After the service for Chris—surely it would be simple—she'd invite her new neighbors, few as they might be, to her house for coffee or drinks or both. Food too.

Elinor realized that her spirits had picked up because the pool was vanquished. She'd have it filled in with stones, with the agent's and also the owner's permission of course. Why should she retreat from the house? With stones showing just above the water it would look every bit as pretty, maybe prettier, and it wouldn't be dangerous for the next child who came to live here.

The service for Chris was held at a small local church. The preacher conducted a short nondenominational ceremony. And afterward, around noon, Elinor did have a few people to the house for sandwiches and coffee. The strangers seemed to enjoy it. Elinor even heard a few laughs among the group, which gladdened her heart.

She hadn't, as yet, phoned any of her New York friends to tell them about Chris. Elinor realized that some people might think that "strange" of her, but she felt that it would only sadden her friends to tell them, that it would look like a plea for sympathy. Better the strangers here who knew no grief, because they didn't really know her or Chris.

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"You must be sure and get enough rest in the next days," said a kindly middle-aged woman whose husband stood solemnly beside her. "We all think you've been awfully brave."

Elinor gave Jane the dotted-numbers book to take to Bill

That night Elinor slept more than twelve hours and awoke feeling better and calmer. She began to write the letters that she had to write—to Cliff's parents, to her own mother and father, and to three good friends in New York. Then she finished typing her article.

The next morning she walked to the post office and sent off her letters, and also her article to her agent in New York. She spent the rest of the day sorting out Chris's clothing, his books and toys, and she washed some of his clothes with a view to passing them on to Jane for Bill, providing Jane wouldn't think it unlucky. Elinor didn't think Jane would. Jane telephoned in the afternoon to ask how she was.

"Is anyone coming to see you? From New York? A friend, I mean?"

Elinor explained that she'd written to a few people, but she wasn't expecting anyone. "I'm really feeling all right, Jane. You mustn't worry."

By evening Elinor had a neat carton of clothing ready to offer Jane, and two more cartons of books and toys. If the clothes didn't fit Bill, then Jane might know a child they would fit. Elinor felt better for that. It was a lot better than collapsing in grief, she thought. Of course it was awful, a tragedy that didn't happen every day—losing a husband and a child in hardly more than three months. But Elinor was not going to succumb to it. She'd stay out the six months in the house here, come to terms with her loss, and emerge strong, someone able to give something to other people, not merely to take.

She had two ideas for future articles. Which to do first? She decided to walk out into the garden and let her thoughts ramble. Maybe the radishes had come up? She'd have a look at the pond. Maybe it would be glassy smooth and clear. She must ask the Weed-Killer people when it would be safe to put in another carp—or two carps.

When she looked at the pond she gave a short gasp. The vines had come *back*.

They looked stronger than ever—not longer, but more dense. Even as she watched, one tentacle, then a second, actually moved,

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curved toward the land and seemed to grow an inch. That hadn't been due to the wind.

The vines were growing visibly. Another green shoot poked its head above the water's surface. Elinor watched, fascinated, as if she beheld animate things, like snakes. Every inch or so along the vines a small green leaf sprouted, and Elinor was sure she could see some of these unfurling.

The water looked clean, but she knew that was deceptive. The water was somehow poisonous. It had killed a carp. It had killed Chris. And she could still detect, she thought, a rather acid smell of the stuff the Weed-Killer men had put in.

There must be such a thing as digging the roots out, Elinor thought, even if Weed-Killer's stuff had failed. Elinor got the fork from the toolshed, and the clippers. She thought of getting her rubber boots from the house, but was too eager to start to bother with them. She began by hacking all round the edge with the clippers. Some fresh vine ends cruised over the pond and jammed themselves amid other growing vines. The stems now seemed tough as plastic clotheslines, as if the herbicide had fortified them. Some had put down roots in the grass quite a distance from the pond.

Elinor dropped the clippers and seized the fork. She had to dig deep to get at the roots, and when she finally pulled with her hands, the stems broke, leaving some roots still in the soil. Her right foot slipped, she went down on her left knee and struggled up again, both legs wet now. She was not going to be defeated.

As she sank the fork in, she saw Cliff's handsome, subtly smiling eyes in the photograph in the bedroom, Cliff with the blade of grass or straw between his lips, and he seemed to be nodding ever so slightly, approving. Her arms began to ache, her hands grew tired. She lost her right shoe in dragging her foot out of the water yet again, and she didn't bother trying to recover it. Then she slipped again and sat down, water up to her waist.

Tired, angry, she still worked with the fork, trying to pry roots loose, and the water churned with a muddy fury. She might even be doing the damned roots good, she thought. Aerating them or something. Were they invincible? Why should they be? The sun poured down, overheating her, bringing nourishment to the green, Elinor knew.

Nature knows. That was Cliff's voice in her ears. Cliff sounded happy and at ease.

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Elinor was half blinded by tears. Or was it sweat? *Chun-nk* went her fork. In a moment, when her arms gave out, she'd cross to the other side of the pond and attack there. She'd got some roots out. She'd make Weed-Killer come again, maybe pour kerosene on the pond and light it.

She got up on cramped legs and stumbled around to the other side. The sun warmed her shoulders though her feet were cold. In those few seconds that she walked, her thoughts and her attitude changed, though she was not at once aware of this. It was neither victory nor defeat that she felt.

She sank the fork in again, again slipped and recovered. Again roots slid between the tines of the fork, and were not removed. A tentacle thicker than most moved toward her and circled her right ankle. She kicked, and the vine tightened, and she fell forward.

She went face down into the water, but the water seemed soft. She struggled a little, turned to breathe, and a vine tickled her neck. She saw Cliff nodding again, smiling his kindly, knowing, almost imperceptible smile. It was nature. It was Cliff. It was Chris.

A vine crept around her arm—loose or attached to the earth she neither knew nor cared. She breathed in, and much of what she took in was water. *All things come from water,* Cliff had said once. Little Chris smiled at her with both corners of his mouth upturned. She saw him stooped by the pond, reaching for the dead carp which floated out of range of his twig. Then Chris lifted his face again and smiled.

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a *NEW* Rand adventure by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand, head of the Department of Concealed Communications, versus Taz, his Russian counterpart—two code-and-cipher experts usually in deadly competition, now seemingly cooperating. Détente or subtle confrontation? But even in a duel of wits, each wary and suspicious of the other, with no love lost between them, these two old enemies had their strict professional pride . . .

THE SPY WHO COLLECTED LAPEL PINS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

He was not an old man, but the years had not dealt kindly with Comrade Taz. As he walked across the field toward the lights of the distant farmhouse, he could feel the ache in his right leg coming back again. It was a war injury from his youth, 30 years ago, when he'd shown a fleeting moment of courage in front of a German tank on the outskirts of Berlin.

During all those years in Moscow, heading up Section Six of the KBG, he had hardly thought of the old war injury. It gave him no trouble, and he walked without a noticeable limp. It was only now, in retirement to a collective farm an hour's drive from Moscow, that the ache and the limp had reoccurred. It was the life, his sturdy wife Lara insisted. His legs were made for walking on paved sidewalks, not trudging across newly plowed fields.

As he neared the farmhouse, he was surprised to see a black government staff car pulled in off the road. In this collective, made up entirely of former government employees, one rarely was visited by the bureaucracy. He entered the kitchen door with just a bit of apprehension, to find Lara conversing with two men in overcoats who gave the impression of having just arrived.

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Taz knew one of them—Colonel Tunic, a grizzled old man who'd been his immediate superior during the Cold War days. The other, a younger official who carried himself with an air of newly acquired authority, was a stranger to him.

"Comrade Taz!" Tunic greeted him, throwing out both arms in an affectionate bear hug. "You look well. Retirement must agree with you."

"Lara says farm work is bad on my legs. How are things back in Moscow?"

"Good, good." He gave a rueful smile. "Détente, you know." Remembering the other man, he turned to introduce him. "Comrade Taz, this is Stepan Vronsky, a specialist in international matters."

The two men shook hands, and Taz wondered what Vronsky's true function was. He wondered especially what had brought these men out here to see him. "You look cold," he told them. "Take off your coats and have some vodka."

"I could never live in the country," Stepan Vronsky said. "The wind is so cold!"

Taz smiled. "One becomes used to it. Lara, bring us some glasses, will you?"

When they were seated around the rough oak kitchen table, which Lara had thoughtfully covered with a piece of flowered oilcloth, Colonel Tunic said, "We miss you in Moscow. You retired too soon."

Taz merely shrugged. "Cipher experts of my sort have been replaced by machines. Diplomats and machines."

"Sometimes there is still need for one," Vronsky said. Taz turned to study his face and saw only the pale reflection of the Russian winter with its sunless days.

"We miss you," Colonel Tunic repeated. "And now we need you. The government wishes you to come out of retirement for one final assignment to the west."

The words fell like thunder on Taz's ears. He'd been expecting it, certainly, ever since he saw the long black car pulled up before his house. But to hear it now was still a shock. "What sort of assignment?" he asked quietly.

"Some material must be taken to Switzerland. It's in your line—microdots."

Taz snorted. "A diplomatic courier could get it through for you, as you well know."

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"That's only part of it. There's something else." Tunic shifted in his chair. "An old friend of yours is involved."

"Who would that be?"

"Remember Jeffery Rand, the head of Britain's Double-C?"

"Of course."

Vronsky spoke again. "You should welcome an opportunity to confront an old enemy one more time."

"Rand is not my enemy," Taz replied. "We were two professional men doing our jobs."

"Nevertheless, he is on the other side."

"Yes," Taz admitted. "Just what do you have in mind?"

"You are familiar with the Nobel Prize recipient, Kolia Komarov?"

"Certainly." Despite nominal press censorship, almost everyone in the Soviet Union must have been aware of the Komarov case. A powerful novelist in the tradition of Turgenev, his choice as the Nobel laureate last fall had stirred up all the old fires in Russian literary circles. Though Komarov had written harshly of past Soviet governments, the men in the Kremlin did not want another Pasternak or Solzhenitsyn case on their hands. They had allowed Komarov to leave Moscow to accept the award in Stockholm. In his acceptance speech he announced to the startled world his defection from Russia.

"Then you know he's living in Switzerland now. And you also know he was forced to leave several of his manuscripts behind when he fled."

"Yes."

"Komarov still has a great many friends here. Recently his wife—who fled with him to Switzerland—contacted a cousin. Arrangements were made to smuggle his manuscripts out of the country. The cousin, a loyal Party member, came to us." Vronsky smiled slightly, proud of his accomplishment. "Specifically, to me."

"I see." Taz took a sip of his vodka. "And where do I fit in?"

Colonel Tunic took over the story. Despite the difference in their ages and bearing, Tunic and Vronsky might have been partners in a traveling comedy act. Taz thought about this and chuckled inwardly. He wondered why he had never laughed at Tunic during all their years together in Moscow.

"The manuscript material has been reduced to microdots," Tunic said. "With your experience in the field, and especially your

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experience with Rand, you are the natural choice to deliver it."

"Rand would hardly believe I was performing an act contrary to Soviet policy. He knows I am loyal. And you have not yet told me how Rand figures in all this."

"Rand will be involved when you get him involved. You make contact with him and arrange a meeting in Geneva. He'll come, of course. You explain that you have always been a great admirer of Kolia Komarov's writing, and for this reason you have smuggled his manuscript out of Russia, in microdot form. You ask Rand's help in getting you through the guards to visit Komarov. He does so, the microdots prove to be useless, and the British are discredited in Komarov's eyes."

"A trick," Vronsky chortled. "A hoax!" The thought seemed to please him.

"Is this the way we wage war now?" Taz asked distastefully.

"We wage it any way we can."

"You don't need me for it," Taz decided with a wave of his hand, as if chasing away a pesky fly.

"We need you for Rand."

"And why do you need Rand? He is not the British government. He is not even British Intelligence. He is only one man, like myself."

Colonel Tunic shifted uneasily. "There is more to it, Comrade. We cannot tell you everything at this point, but you must trust us."

Lara came back into the kitchen. Taz saw her eyes catch his, but he couldn't read the message there. Perhaps it was only a reflection of his own misgivings.

With the coming of winter London had settled beneath a dreary mantle of mist, reminding Rand of his annual promise to move to the south of France. This morning especially was one of low dark clouds that blotted out the sun. From his wide window overlooking the muddy Thames he could see only the bare outlines of the city—the new high-rise apartments, the dome of St. Paul's that was Christopher Wren's supreme achievement. Everything else was a somber gray blur.

He was halfway through the morning's routine of reports and mail when Parkinson entered. "We've got something unusual here, sir."

"On the Syrian matter?"

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"No, it's a message we intercepted in the old cipher the Russians used when Taz was in charge. I haven't seen it in years."

"Odd."

"Odder still, the message seems addressed to you."

Rand took the sheet of lined intercept paper that Parkinson held out. *Rand*, it read, *you may see your old friend from Paris at the Hotel de Ville in Geneva on Monday next.*

"What do you make of it, sir?"

"I don't quite know." The message had been sent by a route that Taz must have known the British would intercept.

But Taz was in retirement.

Or was he?

Later that day Rand phoned Hastings and told him he would be out of the country for a couple of days the following week. There was a matter in Geneva that needed checking into.

He'd always found Geneva to be a beautiful city, situated as it was at the point where the Rhone River exited from its brief journey across Lake Leman. There were lovely little parks running along both sides of the river at the point of exit, with jetties leaping out from either shore and beacons to guide the traveler.

The Hotel de Ville was in another of the city's parks, a half mile from the water. It faced the University and the Monument of the Reformation, both flanking the Promenade des Bastions which ran through the center of the park. Rand had checked in just after three, and was considering whether the park or the shore would make the more pleasing stroll while he waited for contact.

As it turned out, the decision was made for him.

"Message for you, sir," the clerk called as he was crossing the lobby toward the street.

"For me?"

"You are Mr. Rand?"

"That's right." He opened the folded piece of paper and read: *Your old friend awaits you by the Jetty of the Spring Tides.*

Rand smiled slightly and slipped the note into his pocket.

The Jetty of the Spring Tides was the one closest to the hotel, on the south bank of the river. He reached it after a twenty-minute walk that reminded him again of the city's charms.

At first he didn't recognize the iron-haired man with the beard who occupied a bench near the jetty. He'd almost gone by when a half-remembered voice said, "The lake is enchanting here, with the mountains in the background."

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"Taz!"

"Are you surprised?"

Rand sat down beside him. "Not really, I suppose. You are the only one who would have used that old cipher."

"I'm glad you came. I didn't know if—"

"What is it? I'd heard you retired to a farm outside Moscow."

Taz smiled, and Rand caught the glint of a gold tooth he hadn't noticed on their previous meetings. Perhaps Taz had never smiled then. "A collective—a special one for loyal government employees like myself. It would bear little resemblance to your farms in England."

"What brings you to Geneva?"

"I have come out of retirement. The indispensable man." He said it with a slight smile.

"That's bad news for Concealed Communications."

"Not so bad, really. Our cipher section is fully automated now—rotor-type cipher machines, one-time pads produced by machine, even electronic voice scramblers. They hardly need a man at all."

"And yet you've come back."

Taz shrugged. "A simple courier mission." He took out one of the familiar long Russian cigarettes and lit it. "But tell me about yourself, Rand. Any thought of retirement?"

"Maybe," he admitted. "I'm getting married soon."

"Married?"

Rand smiled at Taz's surprise. Hastings had been surprised too. "You may have heard of her—Leila Gaad, from Egypt. She's been living and teaching in England since last summer."

"Oh, yes. You shared some adventures with her, I believe, back in the days when we were active in her country."

"Right."

"Does she want you to retire?"

Rand nodded. "And I'm thinking seriously about it. All this détente is bad for the budget. Besides, with you retired, the fun's gone out of it."

Taz nodded, stroking his beard. "We can leave it for the younger men."

"Even your writer, Kolia Komarov, has retired—at least from Russia."

Taz seemed to tense a bit at his words. "Why do you mention Komarov?"

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"Oh, come now! We've sparred at long distance for too many years not to know each other fairly well. At the moment the only thing of interest to the Russians in Geneva is Kolia Komarov."

"You are correct, of course," Taz admitted readily. "I make no secret of it. In fact, since you have guessed the purpose of my mission, perhaps you can even assist me with it."

The whole thing was coming too easily. Rand felt as if he was being drawn into something that had been carefully orchestrated by Moscow. "How can I do that?" he asked.

"As you know, Komarov and his wife fled while in Sweden to accept his Nobel Prize. They fled without his precious manuscripts and notes. In recent weeks attempts have been made to smuggle these papers out of Russia."

"A difficult job. I understand they'd fill a large filing cabinet."

"That is correct."

"Where do you fit in?"

"Here," he answered simply. He opened an attaché case on the bench by his side and removed a stiff leather-covered folder. "My *znachki* collection!"

The Russian opened the folder to reveal a felt surface bedecked with dozens of colorful souvenir lapel pins and covered with a protective sheet of plastic. The collecting of such pins, Rand knew, was a popular hobby in the Soviet Union. Virtually every organization in the country minted the little emblems, which were bought and traded with relish.

"A good hobby for a retired man," Rand observed. "In England we still collect stamps."

"This is the lapel pin of the Rostov Bureau of Travel," Taz said, reaching beneath the plastic sheet to remove it and hand it to Rand. "It's very rare. I had to trade five others for it."

The small metal disc looked something like a military decoration. Rand turned it over and studied the back. A tiny black dot was affixed to the very center of the metal. At a casual glance it might have been part of the workmanship.

"Microdot," Rand said in a neutral tone. "On the backs of them all, I suppose."

Taz grinned. "No one questions an old man's hobby. Actually, it is a trick I learned from the Americans. As early as their Civil War, the Rebels were carrying minutely photographed dispatches hidden inside metal buttons. An amazing accomplishment for the early days of photography!"

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Suddenly the thing fell together for Rand. "Are you telling me these microdots contain Kolia Komarov's manuscripts and notes?"

Taz merely spread his hands in a gesture that might have meant anything. "I have contacted you because I feel you could arrange a meeting with Komarov. They say he is guarded by agents of British Intelligence."

"I wouldn't know about that," Rand answered, a bit stiffly.

"Could I see him?"

Rand studied the lapel pin in his hand. "How do I know this is what you say it is?"

"I've not said what it is, but you are free to take that one and examine it."

"Thank you."

Taz put a hand on his shoulder. "My old friendly enemy Rand! We have been through so much together."

Rand dropped the lapel pin into his pocket. "When will I see you?"

"I will be here at the same time tomorrow." He patted the folder. "With my *znachki.*"

By the following morning Rand had an enlargement of the microdot along with a visitor from the security division of Intelligence. His name was Michael Gentres and he was a calm man who moved very slowly.

"You're Rand, I suppose. Here's the print you wanted."

Rand glanced at the enlarged pages of typewritten Russian text. "What is it, Major?"

"Part of Kolia Komarov's novel in progress. He saw it this morning and confirmed its authenticity," Gentres replied.

"I see."

"Is there more where this came from?"

"Apparently." Rand shrugged.

"What's the price?"

"I don't really know," Rand admitted. "My contact is willing to deliver the rest, but only to Komarov personally."

"That might be difficult to arrange. He's staying at a safe house and we want it to remain that way."

"Could I see him?"

"I suppose so. You have a double-X security clearance."

Gentres drove Rand to a little house near the edge of the city, taking care to see they weren't followed. It was a quiet street of

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elderly retired people, in an older section of Geneva, and there was little to distinguish Komarov's house from others on the street.

The man who answered the door was obviously armed and probably in the pay of British Intelligence, which had taken a special, if clandestine, interest in the Russian author's safety. Gentres spoke a brief quotation from Keats—obviously the day's password—and they were shown into a sparsely furnished parlor.

The woman appeared first, and Rand recognized her from newspaper pictures as Mrs. Komarov. She was both younger and prettier than the news photos had shown, with straw-colored hair and tanned skin that might have come from a youth spent in the wheatfields of central Russia. "Her name is Sasha," Gentres said. "But she speaks no English. Her husband speaks a little."

She sat down quietly with hands folded and after a moment Kolia Komarov himself strode into the room. Immediately Rand sensed a charging of the atmosphere. The Russian author was tall and bushy-bearded, with deep brown eyes that flashed at the person to whom he was speaking. His English was remarkably good, though his vocabulary seemed limited.

"You are Rand?" he asked, extending his hand. "A pleasure."

Rand showed him the microdot blowup. "You saw this earlier today?"

"Yes. It is my manuscript."

"It is possible we can recover all of it. And your notes too. They've been smuggled out of Russia on microdots by a man named Taz."

He'd spoken too fast for Komarov to absorb it all, and he went back over it slowly. Finally the Russian glanced at his wife and said a few questioning words in his native tongue. When she shook her head he replied, "We know of no Taz."

"He was a cipher expert in Moscow. He's retired now."

"Ah. We do not know him. Why should he do this?"

"I don't exactly know," Rand admitted. "But he wants to see you to deliver the rest. I could arrange it for this afternoon."

The brown eyes flashed. "He wants me to return?"

"No, he wouldn't have brought the manuscripts if he wanted you to go back."

Komarov nodded. "Bring him. Then I can work."

Rand glanced at Gentres for confirmation. "Oh, very well," the Major said.

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"Fine. I'll try to set it up for later today."

Taz was seated on the bench by the water, as he had been the day before. He watched Rand's approach with an interested eye, keeping one hand always on the attaché case by his side.

"I am glad you could come," he said, smiling broadly.

Rand sat down beside him. "I saw our man this morning. He's most anxious to obtain the rest of the documents."

Taz continued to smile. "I thought he would be."

"Tell me one thing first. What's in this for you?"

Taz shrugged. "I have always admired his writings. It is with such men as Komarov that the future of Russia lies—not with the bureaucrats in their Kremlin offices. Now that I am retired I owe my allegiance to Russia, not to the Party."

Rand nodded. "I think you've made a wise choice. I'll take you to see Kolia Komarov."

"How soon?"

"Later this afternoon if you'd like. After dark might be best, when there are fewer people to see you. His location is a secret, but your people may already have it under observation."

"I wouldn't want them to observe my arrival," Taz admitted.

"I thought not." Rand mused for a moment. "I could have my car pick you up at the park across from my hotel."

"That would be fine."

"Shall we say five thirty? It'll be dark by then."

"Good."

Rand got to his feet. "The park across from the Hotel de Ville, then. I'll be in the car, with a driver and perhaps another man." He was thinking that Gentres might insist on joining them, and he could offer no objection to that.

"Until then," Taz said, and they shook hands.

Heading back to his hotel, Rand hoped this wouldn't be a night like one other he'd spent in Switzerland years earlier. That time, on a mission to Berne involving the Chinese embassy, Rand had been double-crossed by his own people. The memory of it still rankled. If he couldn't trust his own people, whom could he trust?

Taz?

"Comrade Taz!"

Colonel Tunic greeted him with a smile, throwing open his arms. "How did your meeting go?"

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"Very well," Taz acknowledged. "Rand is picking me up across from his hotel at five thirty."

"To see Kolia Komarov?"

"Yes."

Colonel Tunic gripped him by both shoulders. "Excellent! Excellent! I knew you would not fail us. Do you hear that, Stepan?"

Vronsky came in from the other room. Their suite in Geneva's other leading hotel was hardly austere enough to inspire confidence in the workers back home, Taz decided, but then the workers would never know about it.

"Good news," Vronsky agreed. "Do you have the *znachki*?"

"Right here," Taz said, opening the attaché case.

Vronsky took the folder and opened it, revealing the assorted lapel pins. "Now here is what you will do. Deliver this to Kolia Komarov at the safe house where he's staying. Spend a few minutes with him, and then leave at once. You understand?"

Taz was just beginning to. "You said back home there was more to it."

"And there is. But you don't want them to discover the microdots are faked, do you? At least, not while you're in the room."

Taz suddenly felt very tired. "The microdots are not faked. I examined several of them myself this morning with a magnifying glass."

"Why would you do that?" Colonel Tunic asked. "Did you doubt our word?"

"With cause, it seems. You told me it was to be a hoax."

"And so it will. Please do not spoil our careful planning, Comrade Taz."

Taz sat down then, in one of the ornate golden-armed chairs. "I remember a story," he said slowly. "It happened a decade ago in a Middle Eastern country. One of our code clerks at the embassy there was ordered to commit an act of political assassination. The KGB supplied him with an electrically operated pistol and poisoned bullets. The fact that he was in cryptography meant nothing to those higher up. He was simply one more tool to be used and discarded. As you must remember, the assassination was successful."

"We remember," Colonel Tunic said dryly.

"And Kolia Komarov?"

A shrug. "Deliver the *znachki*, Comrade."

"Is this all I am good for after a lifetime of service?"

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Vronsky still held the leather-covered folder in his hands. He reached under the protective plastic covering and made a slight adjustment to one of the metal pins. Then he closed the cover and handed the folder back to Taz. "Now then, no more foolish talk. Deliver it, and then leave the house at once."

Taz sighed and accepted the folder. "Tell me one thing. Why did you need to copy all the material? Why make all the microdots authentic?"

"Rand is no fool. He might have asked to examine some at random. Besides, it makes no difference. Kolia Komarov will never use the material."

"The public outcry—"

"Will be directed against the British who were guarding him. We will deny everything, of course. You will be safely back home. The Moscow intellectuals will have received a warning they can't ignore. And Rand will be dead or in disgrace."

"Yes," Taz said slowly. "Yes, I see." He placed the folder carefully inside his attaché case, handling it with new respect. Then he rose to his feet. "I must be going. It is almost time."

Stepan Vronsky had a final word of caution. "You saw the lapel pin I adjusted. Do not touch it under any circumstances."

"I understand."

"Good luck, Comrade."

Rand tapped the driver on the shoulder. "That's him, across the street. And right on time."

"I don't know about this," Michael Gentres said uneasily. "London wouldn't like it."

"We're getting Komarov's manuscripts back, aren't we?"

"Couldn't that have been done without Taz meeting the man?"

"Do you expect him to pull a gun out of his pocket and begin shooting?"

"Stranger things have happened. They used an ax on Trotsky."

"I assume you'll search him for axes and guns," Rand said dryly.

They pulled up before the waiting man and Rand opened the door on his side. "You British are very prompt," Taz said as he climbed in with his attaché case.

"We try to be," Rand answered. "This is Michael Gentres, Comrade Taz." He didn't introduce the driver because Gentres hadn't mentioned his name. But the man seemed to know their destina-

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tion without being told. He drove quickly through the dark streets of the city, negotiating turns with the skill of a London cabby. Rand would not have remembered the route to the safe house, but the driver apparently knew it by heart.

Presently they pulled up before the house Rand had visited earlier. There was a man on duty inside the door and he opened it as they approached. "You'll have to be searched," Gentres told Taz.

"Of course," the Russian replied, obviously expecting it.

The man at the door ran his hands quickly over Taz's body, then used a battery-operated metal detector for a more careful search. Each time it buzzed the Russian produced his keys or cigarette case and other metal objects, all of which were examined. There was also a portable x-ray unit, similiar to those used to inspect carry-on luggage at airports. The attaché case with its folder of lapel pins was passed behind the screen while they watched.

"All right," Gentres said with a grunt, satisfied with the rows of metal emblems that appeared on the x-ray screen. "You can take the folder in, but leave the attaché case out here."

Taz did as he was told, removing the *znachki* with care. "This is a great moment for me," he said quietly. "I have admired Kolia Komarov for many years."

The driver and the guard remained by the door, while Gentres escorted Rand and Taz into the living room. They sat waiting quietly, and after a few minutes the bearded Komarov appeared as he had done earlier in Rand's presence. He looked around the room uncertainly, and bowed slightly to Taz.

"My *znachki* collection," Taz said, speaking English so the others could understand. "You should find it quite interesting."

Komarov accepted it and opened the folder, gazing down at the rows of little metal lapel pins. "Once I had them too," he said, speaking with some difficulty. "Back in Moscow."

"But not like these. Examine the backs." Taz bent over and slipped one of the lapel pins from under the plastic cover. "See?"

Rand stepped closer to look. The microdot was in place, at the exact center of the pin's reverse side. "Do you have viewing equipment here?" he asked Gentres.

"Certainly."

The microdot was inserted into an optical viewer and immediately blown up to readable size. The neatly arranged pages of Kolia Komarov's manuscript leaped into view. "Is it authentic?" Rand asked the author.

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"It seems so. Yes, I remember these pages."

Rand looked up at Taz. "And the rest?"

Taz motioned toward the collection. "There are forty-eight lapel pins. Each of them contains a microdot. Each microdot can be enlarged to show dozens of typewritten pages. I leave them to you."

"You're going?"

"I have been here too long already. They may be watching my hotel."

"Wait—" Rand said, not knowing why he spoke. There was something not quite right. "Can I see you alone for a moment, Taz?"

"Certainly."

They stepped into the next room, leaving Gentres and Komarov alone with the folder of lapel pins. Rand faced him and sighed. "Taz, my old enemy—"

"What is it?"

"The *znachki* is just too large for a mere forty-eight microdots. They could be carried on your passport, or in a bandage on your finger. In our business, *large* attracts attention, and all attention is bad. Ever since the days of the Trojan Horse we have had reason to question anything that is larger than it should be."

"Trojan Horse?"

"You remember it, surely. Could your *znachki* be a Trojan Horse, Comrade Taz?"

"In what way?"

"Not a listening device, because that would have shown up on the x-ray. But something nonmetallic, like a thin layer of plastic explosive hidden in the leather binding, would pass inspection. One of the lapel pins could be the detonator, and when it was removed from the felt backing—"

Gentres interrupted with a call from the next room. "Rand, we've checked all the lapel pins. There are forty-eight microdots, just as he said. We're starting to view them now."

Taz allowed himself a slight smile. "So much for your theory, Mr. Rand. If it was correct, we would all be in pieces now."

"I'm sorry," Rand said simply.

"Now I really must be going. Perhaps we will see each other again someday."

Rand followed him to the door. "They're waiting for you outside? Is that it?"

Taz picked up his attaché case and opened it. Rand caught a

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glimpse of a second *znachki* folder, identical with the first. The driver and the guard were watching them, and Taz stepped very close so his words could not be overheard. "Understand one thing about me, Rand. I have no love for the West, no love for your system. Someday we will still bury you. But I am a proud old man, and I do not come out of retirement to ply an assassin's trade. The *znachki* collection you have is harmless. I changed one of the pins."

"Then I was right?"

Taz merely smiled. "Perhaps this is one time when we both were right, my old enemy."

He opened the door and stepped outside. The street seemed deserted, and he started off along the sidewalk. "The car can take you back," Rand called. Taz kept walking, ignoring him.

"Follow him," Rand told the driver. "But at a distance. I want to know if he's picked up."

"I have to take my orders from Major Gentres, sir."

Rand cursed softly. "Never mind. I'll do it myself." He slipped on his coat and followed Taz.

Colonel Tunic was holding open the door of the car when Taz reached it. He'd walked for three blocks, and had been about to give up searching for them. "We did not want to get too close," Tunic said. "How did it go?"

"Well."

Vronsky sat behind the wheel of the car. "Is that all? I heard no explosion."

"You will not hear one," Taz said firmly. "I do not fight my wars that way. I am not the simple code clerk in that Middle Eastern embassy, ready to jump when the KGB pulls the strings."

Colonel Tunic bit his lip. "Comrade Taz, where is the folder?"

"Right here," Taz said, opening his attaché case.

In the front seat Vronsky yanked the pistol from his coat and fired once at Taz's chest.

He was just an instant too late.

Rand was still a block away when the explosion shattered the night on the quiet street. His reflexes threw him to the pavement for an instant. Then he was up and running toward the flaming car.

People were rushing from the houses, and after a moment the pulsating whine of a siren could be heard in the distance. He

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could see it was too late to help the car's occupants. He tried to get close, but the flames drove him back.

Presently Gentres joined him. "Was that Taz?" he asked.

Rand nodded solemnly. "Looks as if there were one or two others with him."

"My God. That could have been us."

"No," Rand said. "Taz decided it wouldn't be us."

"You mean he turned against his own people?"

"I think it had something to do with a man's pride in his work. I think they recruited the wrong person for this job."

"Definitely the wrong person," Gentres said, watching the flames.

"But it was a close one for Komarov. They were able to follow your driver here."

The fire engines had arrived, and a stream of water hit the blazing car with a hiss and shower of sparks. They moved back out of the way.

"Not such a close one," Gentres said. "You see, I didn't trust Taz as much as you did, Rand. And Russians with full black beards look pretty much alike. The real Kolia Komarov is ten miles from here. Perhaps in the morning you'd like to meet him."

"Q"

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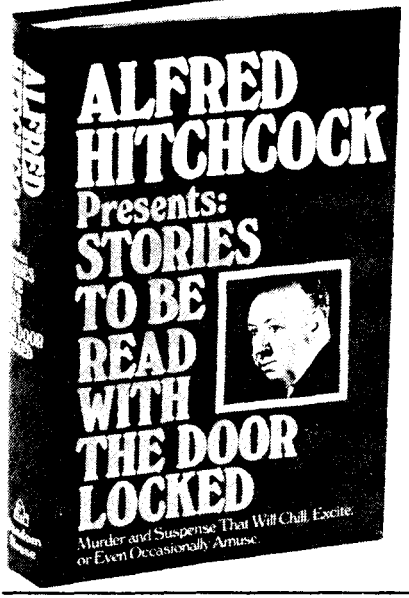
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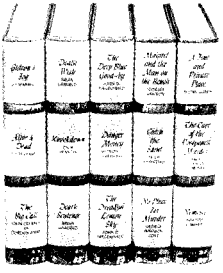

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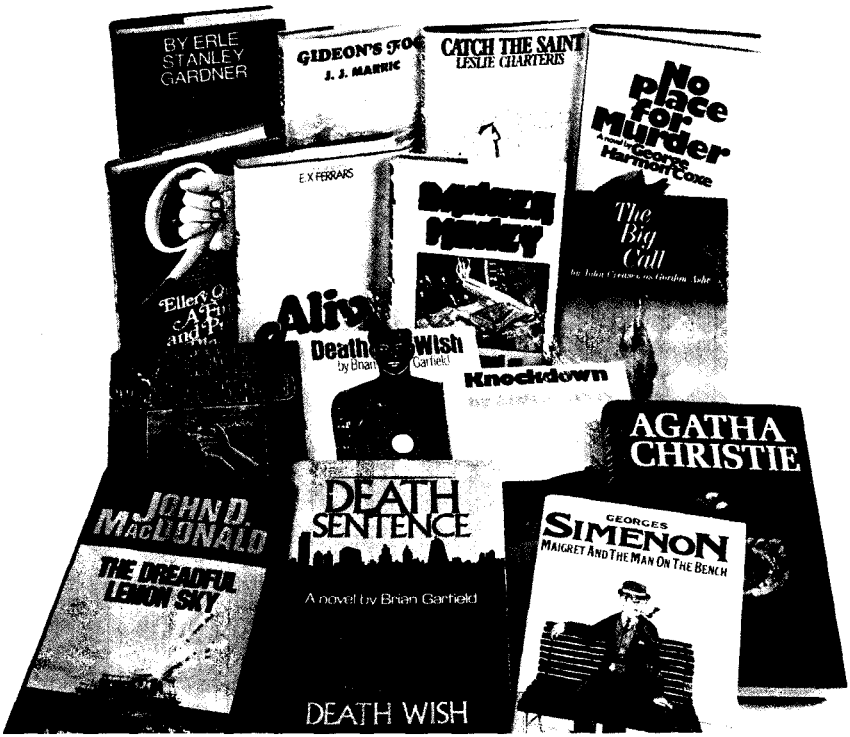

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